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## LE BEAU SABREUR

BY  
ANNIE THOMAS

*Authorized Edition*

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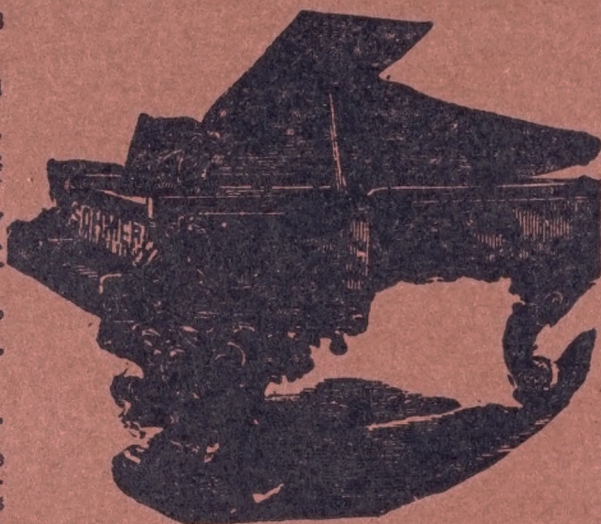
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**LE BEAU SABREUR.**



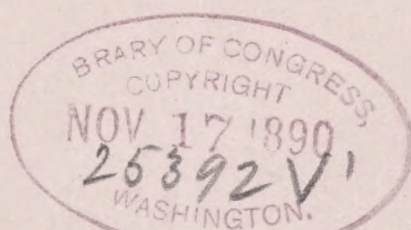


# LE BEAU SABREUR

✓  
BY  
ANNIE THOMAS,  
AUTHOR OF

“DENIS DONNE,” “PLAYED OUT,” “THAT OTHER WOMAN,”  
“THE LOVE OF A LADY,” ETC., ETC.

*Authorized Edition*



NEW YORK 0

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150 WORTH ST., COR. MISSION PLACE

(1890)



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TO

MAJOR H. BYRON WOODS,

AND TO

“RUSH,”

BEST OF BULL-DOGS AND MOST FAITHFUL OF FRIENDS,

THIS STORY IS

DEDICATED

WITH WARM SYMPATHY AND REGARD

BY THE AUTHOR.







# LE BEAU SABREUR.

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## CHAPTER I.

A SULTRY day ! Warmth and color in abundance in the air, though the action is taking place in cold, unsympathetic, colorless, climateless England.

Hearts of all sorts and conditions are beating high in all quarters—purely fashionable, strictly military—and mediocremely middle-class. For it is at the Grand Military Tournament at the Royal Agricultural Hall, open to all officers in the British army, that the story opens, and the hero of it, “*Le Beau Sabreur*,” is introduced to the fiction-reading public.

In a conspicuous position just above the committee and judges’ box, and close to the Royal one, a beautiful woman sits surrounded by some of the smartest men in



London. Her dress, her pose, her style, her form, altogether are faultless. Her temperature and circulation, too, are in perfect order, for she has the supreme art of arriving, instinctively, at the correct conditions which are most conducive to her own well-being, physical and social. These conditions she invariably fulfils herself and forces others to fulfil unscrupulously. She is, in fact, a success !

There is a stir throughout the great assemblage as the names of the men who are "in for the first event," are called. There are eighteen or twenty of them, and the majority have names of note in the annals of military sports. Suddenly the stir grows into a great wave of excitement among the initiated on the announcement being rung out that "at the last moment a man who had only just arrived—Major Forrester of the 1000th—has entered himself for all the events—cutting lemons, tent-pegging, 'tilting at the ring,' and 'heads and posts,'—on an untried horse which he has hastily borrowed."

Down in the Committee-box where the



umpires sat and the prizes were displayed, there passed a thrill of excited admiration as "Major Forrester's" name rang out. A slightly stronger thrill possessed the graceful, supple form of the woman who sat near the Royal box for a moment. But Mrs. Ballantyne is a thorough woman of the world, and there is nothing but the most charming affectation of slight interest in her tones as she leans a hair's breadth further back in her seat and turns her head slightly towards *the* man in attendance whom she is currently most desirous of impressing.

"I knew Major Forrester—slightly in Malta once. I think I remember he was rather good at tilting at the ring or tent-pegging or something."

"He was a deuced sight *too* good at everything. He carried off everything at all the gymcanas when he went in for them."

The man whom Mrs. Ballantyne is most desirous of impressing at the moment is a young city magnate—a stock-broker—reputed to be the possessor of "rocks" of magnitude. Consequently, though he speaks



in rather stiff and surly tones, Mrs. Ballantyne's blue eyes, with the dove's rings around them, regard him leniently—not to say lovingly. Her voice is so low that not one of her other vassals catch the gist of her remark when she murmurs to him.

“You always speak so generously! It makes me feel sure that you can surpass the men you praise.”

“Forrester's the finest and handsomest fellow in the service—the pluckiest too, for the matter of that,” one of the neglected men says decidedly. “For cool dare-devilry and splendid soldiering I'd back him against all comers, no matter what branch of the Service the others came from.”

The City Cræsus frowns ominously. In spite of her effort at self-control Mrs. Ballantyne's blue eyes flash with dangerous delight as she listens to the tribute paid to the well-known gallantry of the “man she has known slightly in Malta.” But Mr. Belton, the millionaire stockbroker, is useful to her just now. So she lowers her eyelids and sets her lips firmly as she says :

“You are an enthusiast, Captain Lisle.”



“As any man would be who has had the luck and honor to serve with Forrester. You must know *I* was his subaltern at Suakim.”

The sole reason which has made Laura Ballantyne cultivate Captain Lisle during the greater part of this London season has been her knowledge of this fact. But now she says steadily,

“Were you, really? I must get you to come and tell me about—about—” Her well-controlled voice wavers for once. Again her eyes flash delightedly, for “Major Forrester’s” name is called, and in answer to the call, a man on a wild-looking chestnut shoots like an arrow through the narrow entrance, and flashes past, bearing the ring on his lance.

Again and again he carries it off, until, having beaten all those who have preceded him, he rides out to make way for those who are to follow. While these are making their efforts—striving, and failing—to beat his record, the attempt shall be made to paint his portrait in black and white.

A man of about—what shall we say? If



a man is "as old as he feels," Forrester, having the heart of a boy still beating in his breast, might have been twenty-five. But as he has attained his present rank of Major he shall be given the extra ten years honestly, which actually belong to him.

Black-haired, gray-eyed, with an originally fair, pale complexion that is now slightly bronzed and enriched by the fierce suns under which he has lived and fought of late years, with the head of a Greek god and the physique of a thoroughbred athlete, the soldier Apollo is a man whom every girl must long for as a lover, every mother covet for her son. Broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped, coming down wedge-shaped with clean length of limb to feet as small and highly arched as any one of those well-born Arabs who had cause to remember him so well,—small wonder that he has the good wishes for his success of all the women present. Small wonder, too, that, as her eager gaze follows his retreating figure, the woman who "has known him slightly in Malta" murmurs, half-aloud:

"If *he* had 'gone down to Camelot' Sir



Lancelot wouldn't have been in it. *What* a fool I was to fancy that life would be worth living without him."

She relapses for a few unwary minutes into a fit of abstraction during which "he" is her theme. She rouses herself from it as once again his name is rung out, and once again he flashes in on his fidgety, unruly chestnut who swerves in her second stride. But she is wrenched round into the straight course again by a hand that has never failed to force man or beast to obey his will, and, to make short the story, the victor at all the gymcanas at Malta during his time is the winner of the ties in all the events at the Grand Military Tournament.

"There are still the 'finals,'" Mr. Belton grates out considerably. "I can't stand that fellow's side. He swaggers on that beastly weedy chestnut as if he had five hundred guineas under him."

"That's unpardonable, as he and the weedy chestnut have carried off everything against men who swagger on five hundred guineas' worth of horse-flesh," Mrs. Bal-lantyne says sweetly, and as she speaks



Belton makes up his mind that she shall *not* have the box-seat on his drag at the next Coaching-Club Meet.

“Let her Forrester get up a scratch team and take her,” the aggrieved stock-broker thinks malignantly. But at the same time he is painfully conscious that if Laura does console herself in the manner he suggests he will feel the world to be hollow for a time, and find that his doll is stuffed with saw-dust.

Mrs. Ballantyne bends forward and throws all her serpent-like will-power into the effort she makes to attract him to look at her when at last Major Forrester rides twice around the hall amidst thunders of applause—the victor in the finals as he had been in the ties. But the snake-like fascination and the will-power will not work to-day. Bare-headed, surrounded by the men who admire him, the more because he has beaten them, he sits on the weedy chestnut and listens to the acclamations which greet his name every time it is pronounced when the prizes are awarded.



“A god of beauty!” she says to herself furiously when at last she realizes that she has failed to arrest his attention, “and like a god—pitiless to any human error *against himself*. Still, I’ll write to him to-night for he is *le beau Sabreur*!”



## CHAPTER II.

## THE MUSICAL RIDE OF THE LANCERS.

“SPECTACULAR beauty set to perfect rhythm,” Mrs. Ballantyne is saying to Captain Lisle as they both watch with joyful, appreciative eyes the musical ride of the Lancers.

It is just after the distribution of the prizes which would—had the programme been adhered to—have closed the performance. But the Lancers are repeating their “Musical Ride” by Royal request.

The clever, graceful, highly-trained horses are dancing every bar of the swinging melody. The pennons are waving in exquisite time. The sight is as splendid, as admirably harmonious a one as the world can show! These magnificent men and horses moving with one accord and



perfect ease through the intricate and complicated figures of the quadrille. For one instant while watching them Mrs. Ballantyne forgets the hero of the day—the man whom she has “known slightly in Malta.” The next she starts and turns round as she hears his voice at her side.

“Have you a word for an old acquaintance, Mrs. Ballantyne? Lisle, old fellow, I saw you directly I came in, that’s why I went for everything. I felt the lucky eye was on me.”

Laura has slid her slim hand into his while he has been speaking, and now it rests there, clasped rather more closely than women’s hands are clasped usually by mere acquaintances.

“If you saw Captain Lisle when you came in, you saw me also?” she says, half-questioningly, half-assertively, “but you never looked at me *once*, not once.” Then she bends her head a little nearer to him, and asks in a whisper: “Were you afraid that mine were not ‘lucky eyes’ that you refused to meet them?”

He is standing erect, looking magnificent



in his superb symmetry and strength, with his head bent down towards her, and his glowing gray eyes devouring every line, every fleeting expression, of her face. This woman has been dear, desperately dear to him ! “Has been !” “Good God, what is she now ?” he asks himself hopelessly as he remembers that she is married !

“They’re the sweetest eyes were\* ever seen, but they’ve brought precious luck to me,” he mutters, and then Laura withdraws her hand with a sigh, and turns to Captain Lisle.

“You dine with us to-night ? Do add your persuasions to mine and induce Major Forrester to come with you. My husband will be so delighted to know you,” she adds frankly, turning a pleading face towards him.

A scowl distorts his face and alters it out of all recognition for a moment. Then, with a quick action, he draws himself up to still grander heights and effaces the signs of passion from his face, as he says :—

“I can’t accept your invitation for to-night, Mrs. Ballantyne,—I’m booked for a



mess dinner, but if you'll allow me I'll call on you to-morrow."

She is disappointed bitterly, bitterly. Every bit of the small heart she possesses went out to this man years ago! Nevertheless, she cast him aside and left him for a man whom she neither hates nor loathes, but to whom she is supremely indifferent. A common case, but none the less pathetic for being common. The man she left has the power still to thrill every fibre of her being. The man she has married nearly bores her out of existence.

"To-morrow? Certainly, and any day and always when it pleases you, *Beau Sabreur*," she whispers. Then, with instantaneous change of manner, she looks at Captain Lisle and says:—

"Have my carriage called, please—I won't claim your escort though it was promised. I know you are both longing to get rid of me in order that you may rake over some of those glorious ashes of the past."

Lisle gets up to do her behest in recalling her carriage. He is a handsome fellow, a little younger than Forrester, well set up,



gallant and debonair, yellow-haired, blue-eyed, able to swagger with the best; but he is dwarfed into insignificance when contrasted with the man whose subaltern he was at Suakim—the man with whom and for whom he would willingly risk his life any day of it.

For two or three minutes while Lisle is seeking for her carriage these two are alone, for the other men have drifted sulkily away. They are alone, but neither of them take advantage of the situation. She won't speak, and he can't. The precious moments fly, and are wasted until they feel it in the atmosphere that Lisle is coming back. Then Major Forrester says:—

“Why did you do it, Laura?”

Her head droops. For once in her mercenary selfish life she is ashamed of the motive which actuated her when she married the rich man with whom she finds existence one long-drawn-out scheme of weariness.

“I was a fool, Harry! that is the only excuse I have to offer—and that's a poor one.”



“Poor indeed,” he mutters bitterly, “not an impulsive fool either. You wove your spells with a good deal of premeditation and discretion. Having got *me* well out of the way—having sent me to rest in a Fool’s Paradise of reliance on you and the love you were so clever at portraying, you set about getting off season invitations to every house Mr. Ballantyne frequented.”

“I did!—and I’m punished for my perfidy,” she says, with frank, engaging, miserable penitence, “my life is one long expiation of my offence. Forgive me, Harry!”

“Forgive you!” The tone in which he ‘forgives’ her fortunately falls on her ears only, or Mrs. Ballantyne would probably be in the Divorce Court before long.

“You can’t dine with us to-night—call to-morrow, four to five,” she whispers with a swift return to animation. Then, almost in the same breath, she adds:

“Captain Lisle, how long you have been! He isn’t half a good escort for a helpless woman, Major Forrester; he seems to think that women must wait, and that man need never hurry.”



“Have you found the time long?” Lisle asks laughingly. For the last six weeks he has been very openly at the feet of pretty, seductive Mrs. Ballantyne. But the mere sight of the man whose subaltern he was at Suakim has restored him to his honorable senses. (“The insinuating she-devil played *him* false”) he remembers, and as he remembers this he forswears forever the friendship of Mrs. Ballantyne. Forswears it to a certain extent, that is. For example, he resolves that he will never be inveigled into doing chief escort duty again, and so giving himself away in public to the woman who has played fast and loose with the man who is his *beau ideal* of soldier, officer, and gentleman. But at the same time he means to hang about for protective purposes. “She shan’t get hold of him again, if I can help it,” he tells himself, and something of his intention makes itself manifest as he says to her:

“Did I tell you that we are off to my people in Norfolk to-morrow? I shall get you to go down with us, Forrester, You



remember my brother Jack, don't you? He has the old place now."

Major Forrester remembers Lisle's brother Jack vaguely, and is saying so in rather an absent manner when Mrs. Ballantyne cuts in incisively:

"You speak as if you were a royal personage: 'We' go to Norfolk to-morrow; or have you started a companion, guide, philosopher, and friend lately, Captain Lisle?"

He sweeps his yellow moustache away from his laughing lips as he answers:

"'We' in this case means my little sister and myself. Nell was a schoolgirl in your time, Forrester, you'll hardly remember her? She lives with Jack and his wife now, but I've had her up in town for a month—"

"And never introduced her to me!" Mrs. Ballantyne interrupts. "What do you mean by treating me so shabbily? I could have taken her about much better than you can possibly have done."

Captain Lisle is looking at the figure of a girl a few yards in front of them. His



eyes dance with delight, fun, and admiration. Every inch of that splendid lithe young figure is dear to him, from the rich crown of ruddy hair on her shapely head to her slender little feet. She moves like a young queen through the crowd, attracting the sort of attention that never insults or annoys a girl. Perhaps this is fortunate for those who are attracted by her, as Captain Lisle is near. For the girl whom he is watching with delighted eyes is the one he *has not* introduced to Mrs. Ballantyne—his comrade, confidante and sister Nell !

Mrs. Ballantyne drives off at last in a state of savage uncertainty. She has not succeeded in extracting a promise from Major Forrester to call on her the next day, not because he is not ready to render her his promise, but because Captain Lisle has interposed adroitly at every turn and put him (Forrester) off. As she passes out of sight the two men slip into a hansom and are driven to the Service Club, to which they both belong.

They have settled down in the smoking-



room, and are talking over that old time at Hasheen, where Captain Forrester “specially distinguished himself” (as usual) by obtaining the range, and in sight of the whole battalion picking off several rebels at over a thousand yards—proving that he had obtained the correct distance; *vide* the journals of the day.

Major Forrester has an unconquerable aversion to speaking of what he has done himself, but he glories in the pluck of his company, and on this theme Lisle knows how to draw him into eloquence.

“Do you remember when the attack was made on the zareba, how you jumped into the mimosa bushes and made yourself a target for the enemy in order that our own fellows might see where the firing came from? Those concealed Arabs had a time of it then when you went for them single-handed, old fellow—”

“Ours were splendid men! how they fought, didn’t they?” Forrester interrupts. I loved my company—they were just the finest fellows a man could desire to command—”



“And they adored you to a man—as we all did,” Lisle cuts in. “The Colonel made me write a report of that affair recommending you for the V. C. Beastly shame you didn’t get it.”

“The poor old Colonel went to the front and died, and—the letters he had written and ordered to be written were never received by the authorities, I believe,” Forrester is saying with a palpable assumption of indifference,—for the thought of these mislaid or suppressed letters of recommendation for the V. C. rankles within him,—when a short, fiery-looking little man struts into the room.

For an instant he halts, staggered at the sight of these two men together—the conjunction is not pleasant to him. He had seen them together last in the thick of the fight at Suakim, and the recollection has its stings, for, through the cloud of dust raised by his flying charger’s heels, a bullet had whizzed horribly near to his panic-stricken form. He remembers too that these men had clearly discerned that he was not galloping ‘towards’ the



enemy ! Still, remembering these and a few other things, he puts on a suave smile and prepares to smoke the pipe of peace.

“ Glad to see you again, Forrester,” he says, holding out his hand. “ Warm to-day isn’t it. You carried off everything as usual at the Tour—” he pauses abruptly, his outstretched hand waggling feebly in the air, for Major Forrester has refused to take it—has, in fact, drawn himself up and turned aside from it, as if it were a loathsome and offensive thing.

The choleric-looking little man does not resent the insult—now ! He walks off in silence to the extreme end of the room, where he occupies himself for a few moments in making notes of the late transaction. The two men he has left smoke in silence for a few minutes, then the junior says:—

“ You made a mistake there, old fellow !—you’ve made Heathcote your enemy for life. Why not have shaken hands with him and buried the hatchet ? ”

“ If you saw a brother-officer running way from the enemy in action how would



you feel about shaking hands with him afterwards? And if you had a pretty strong conviction that a fellow had suppressed letters recommending you for the V.C. would you feel disposed to bury the hatchet?"

"It was a bad day for you when the poor old Colonel died," Lisle says thoughtfully; "he knew you and liked you as well as I do, and he was about the only one of the seniors who did—the rest were either jealous of you, or disgusted with you, because of that perniciously honest habit you have of saying what you think about them!"

"I hate cowards and frauds and humbugs and hypocrites," Forrester responds impulsively.

"My dear fellow! so do I, but I don't go throwing down the glove all over the place as you do. It's not pleasant but it's deuced expedient, not to say necessary, to make to ourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness sometimes," Captain Lisle says, shrugging his shoulders. "That old fellow Heathcote is one of those cautious



Johnnies who never put themselves in false places and are sure to get on. Some day he'll have a chance of giving you a fall, Forrester, and when he gets the chance—he'll take it."



## CHAPTER III.

COLONEL HEATHCOTE has plenty of money, plenty of society, plenty of consideration from that section of the world in which he desires to be well considered. But he suffers from a paucity of that which he pines for above all other worldly goods, and that is the friendship, the regard, the admiration of women.

They say of him that he is "so nice and good-natured; you know!" but they never say "He is so plucky; or "You *know* what he did at —," some place or other where he was in active service when fighting was going on. In fact they regard him as a well-to-do, safe, tom-cat who may be allowed to roam over their house-tops without fear and without reproach.

He never feels the sting of this feminine view which is taken of him more keenly



than when he is in the presence of Major Forrester. For the latter, though he is not a man who talks, is undoubtedly a man who can speak out upon occasions, and some of the occasions on which he finds it relieving to speak out involve Colonel Heathcote in their meshes.

The rebuff he has received from Harry Forrester before a man whom in his heart he always calls "that beast Lisle" has reduced him to the lowest depths of his deeply mean nature. He feels not like a 'whipped hound'—for a hound is a noble animal, but like a whipped cur as he sits smoking and seething among the embers of his smouldering wrath. Fervently for a minute he prays for the heart of a man to be given him—a heart that will enable him to go and demand 'the reason why'—Forrester has refused to take his hand. But his prayer is unavailing! He dare not do it, and he knows that he dare not. 'The reason why' might be roared out in Forrester's clear resonant tones, and—! Well! he (Colonel Heathcote) would rather not have the servants of the club hear it.



Solace of some sort he must have, he feels, as he cringes behind the newspaper. To stay and dine here this night is an impossibility, he feels that he can't breathe the same air with those two "good comrades" who like each other so well, and know so much about him. Like a hunted animal his instincts prompt him to seek sanctuary. The only one he can think of is Mrs. Ballantyne. "I'll call on her tomorrow, and tell her that that braggart Forrester's to the fore again with his infernal lies about me," he thinks, pulling himself into a more erect position, and looking redder and podgier than it is well for a would-be hero to look. "Get a woman on my side and I shall be all right—I shall put that fellow down if he comes across her path, and he will probably, for she has told me that she knew him slightly at Malta."

Acting on the impulse of the moment—the instinct of self-preservation—he writes to Mrs. Ballantyne at once, proffering himself as a visitor to her on the afternoon of the next day. Sagaciously he refrains



from giving her his private address, for it occurs to him that she may write and put him off! She has done so before, and may do it again on this occasion when he needs her helping hand so much! For she knows Forrester "slightly," and can gag him if she pleases, and it is so essential to Colonel Heathcote's current peace of mind that Forrester should be gagged.

Mrs. Ballantyne is one of those fortunate people who are seldom foiled. But when she receives Colonel Heathcote's note announcing that he will call on her the following day, she almost foams under her keen sense of frustrated plans. If she had not injudiciously opened his note and read it aloud to her husband, there would have been no complication. She would simply have been "not at home" to him. As it is however, Mr. Ballantyne insists that "dear old Heathcote shall be received."

"Why not?" he asks; "you've had him here over and over again, and I've often wondered that you were not bored by his stale stories. Why not to-morrow? Are you going out?"



She shrugs her shoulders impatiently.

“I do hate to be asked what I am going to do to-morrow. I like to-morrow to take care of itself, and not to make plans for it.”

“Don’t make plans,” her husband responds affably, “just accept and abide by those that Heathcote and circumstances have made for you.”

She smiles, to erase a frown. But she is a judicious woman, and she honeys the accents in which she says:

“You know that my plans are always subservient to yours, Tom. Of course if you wish me to receive Colonel Heathcote to-morrow I will not only do it, but I will write and ask him to dine with us at eight instead of calling on me at five and having what all you men find so uninteresting unless it is flavored by dubious flirtation—a cup of tea. How do you like my amendment?”

“I think it is a good one, a remarkably good one—both for Heathcote and yourself,” he says drily. And lovely Laura, though she flashes a smile of understanding



and sympathy upon her liege lord, is aware all the time that he is watching her closely, and the knowledge causes her to grind the teeth of her soul in futile rage.

“ At five perhaps you will be ready to go for a drive with me ? ” he suggests pleasantly, and at the words the smile fades from Laura’s face. At five she expects Major Forrester. Though he has not promised to come, she knows that he will do so, for the old charm can’t have lost all its influence over him. Having rid herself of the Heathcote by the polite stroke of inviting him to dinner, instead of enduring him at afternoon tea, she is now confronted by a far more serious difficulty—namely, that of disposing of her husband to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. The sense of injustice which has suddenly sprung up in her soul weakens her hand : it seems to her more than mean and cowardly that Mr. Ballantyne, to whom she has always been agreeable and conciliatory, should suddenly, without provocation, thwart her in this dearest desire of her heart !



In such a natural desire, too, as this : to have a quarter of an hour's quiet conversation with the man who had been her acknowledged, betrothed lover once in those old joyous days of freedom when still the power of choice was hers ! *What* a choice she had made eventually, and how her "choice" was turning and rending her now by his rightful and just intervention ! It comes over her to feel as she sits and looks at him, while in a perfectly justifiable way he is arranging away her happiness for the morrow, that he is a tyrant ! Yet she had never thought him one before ! Now the mere idea that he is a tyrant in destroying her unexplained secret plans colors all his actions in her eyes. She is sure that he is furtively watching for those signs of agitation which she is conscious of betraying ! She longs for the courage to assert her right to freedom of action on the following as on all the past days. But the knowledge that she wants to use this freedom for the purpose of forging fresh chains round Major Forrester fetters her speech. All she can say in reply to her



husband's question: "At five to-morrow perhaps you will be ready to go for a drive with me?" is:—

"Exactly as you please, Tom, but, as I said just now, I detest making plans for to-morrow. I like to-morrow to take care of itself."

It is perhaps well for the sake of harmony that Captain Lisle is announced at this moment, and that dinner claims the attention and consideration of the trio till such time as Mrs. Ballantyne's nerves and temper are in prudent working order again.

For a time there is nothing said about the man who is occupying the place of honor in the thoughts both of Mrs. Ballantyne and Captain Lisle. The latter has almost vowed to set a seal on his lips concerning Harry Forrester before the woman whom he (Lisle) believes to have been the bane of his friend's early life. But Laura has the art of getting her way in most things, and her ears are tingling now with suppressed impatience to hear his name and listen to those extracts from the roll of glory in which that name is



enshrined, and which she knows Lisle can't resist the fascination of waving out whenever he gets a chance.

So when dinner and several glasses of good wine have softened and mellowed Mr. Ballantyne's temper and judgment, Laura says :

“ I've not had time to tell Mr. Ballantyne anything about the Military Tournament yet ; you tell him, Captain Lisle, you will do it better than I can, as I'm not up in the correct phraseology.”

“ I'll reserve my description till we go to the billiard room,” Lisle replies ; “ it would be rather a bore to you to hear the battle fought o'er again so soon after witnessing it. I know how easily you *are* bored, so I'll spare you.”

“ Thanks for your consideration, Captain Lisle,” She speaks with more temper than judgment, and her husband finds it necessary to recall her to her sense of the *convenances* of society by glaring at her mildly. It is the expression which she dislikes of all others to see on his face, and she replies to it with asperity :



“What is it, Tom? What have I said to call forth that look of reprobation?”

“Oh, nothing!” he answers in a tone which tells her plainly that the subject will be thrashed out between them by-and-by, when they are alone.

She rises to leave them immediately after this,—her eyes of most unholy blue flashing ominously at Captain Lisle as she passes him at the door.

“Jealousy is the last quality I should have attributed to you—before to-night,” she mutters, and she is not soothed by his low, laughing reply.

“I’m jealous for him, I admit, not of him.”

She bites her lips and goes on to her deftly-shaded room, which is full of voluptuous beauty and perfume, and sits among her flowers—the fairest of them all!

“Will he come to-morrow? Or will Lisle set himself against me and stop him—for his sister’s sake!” The last thought is an “inspiration” she feels. From this moment Lisle and Lisle’s sister take high



rank among the hated ones in Laura Ballantyne's heart.

Meanwhile Mr. Ballantyne and Captain Lisle are having a quiet smoke in the library; billiards have no attraction for them. Quietly, and without the faintest shadow of suspicion, Mr. Ballantyne has drawn the history of the doings at the Military Tournament from his guest. When Captain Lisle has finished his narration his host says:—

“I hope you will introduce your friend to us if you have an opportunity. I shall be glad to see him here. I think I have heard my wife mention him—she knew him slightly in Malta?”

“Possibly!” Lisle says curtly, and the men smoke in silence for several minutes.

Swinging into Captain Lisle's sitting-room in his bachelor lodgings the next morning, in full expectation of finding his friend alone, Major Forrester finds himself confronted by a lithe, laughing, ruddy-haired girl who springs from her seat and comes straight at him with out-stretched hands.



“ You’re my brother’s friend Forrester,” she cries out heartily ; “ he has just gone out to wire to Jack that we’re all going down to-day. Don’t you remember me, Major Forrester ? ” she adds, with sudden chagrin, as he, still holding her hands, looks at her speechlessly.

“ I can’t say that I do,” he says hesitatingly, “ but Lisle told me his sister was with him, so I suppose you are—”

“ Nell—at your service,” she says dropping his hands and sweeping him a little courtesy, “ how funny, how mortifying that you shouldn’t remember me though, because I remember you so well. Have you forgotten the chestnut mare, Carrots, and the way I came off her on the off side one day when I was galloping her bare-backed in the paddock, and you came in and blew your horn and frightened her ? ”

He has a vague recollection of having once caused a straggling-limbed, red-headed, freckled-faced child to topple ignominiously off the bare-back of a chestnut mare ; but he can’t for the life of him identify her with this young Venus who is



taking him on trust so flatteringly. He would like to tell her that her image, and the painful thought of the disaster which had befallen her through his agency has ever been present in his mind; but he is not good at either mendacity or hypocrisy, so he contents himself with saying:

“ I’ve lived a rough life since the days I was at Hindringham, and forgotten many things that I ought to remember. Among others the incident of which you tell me you were the heroine. I’ll promise not to blow my horn inopportunately again, if you’ll promise to let me ride with you now? ”

“ Why, of course I’ll ride with you—every day and all day long—but not on a bare-backed horse, you understand? ” she adds with a sudden laugh. “ Not that I have any prejudices, but Nina—she’s Jack’s wife—is very fastidious about what her belongings do and say. She’d be very angry with Sydney and me—and you, if she could only know that Syd got me here this morning on purpose to meet you and coax you to come down to Hindringham with us.”



“I’m only too ready to go, I don’t require much coaxing,” he is saying, in blissful forgetfulness of Laura Ballantyne when Captain Lisle comes in, and the sight of him recalls that fair vision to his (Forrester’s) mind.

“You were dining at the Ballantynes’ last night. Did Mrs. Ballantyne say she expected me to call to-day?” he asks.

“Mrs. Ballantyne never by any chance mentions one of her genuine expectations or hopes,” Lisle answers bitterly and injudiciously, for this vein of dislike to Laura which runs through his speech arouses that spirit of staunchness in Major Forrester which is so detrimental to him—so imprudent and so entirely and unselfishly noble.

“Perhaps she didn’t regard my mute reception of her invitation as a promise to call, but of course I meant it as such: and must fulfil my promise. Anxious as I am to be with you all and to see Hindringham again, I’m afraid I can’t go down with you to-day, Miss Lisle, but I’ll run down by an early train to-morrow.”



“ That will do just as well,” Nell says candidly, but her brother scowls at the comrade who is his *beau ideal* of gentleman and soldier as he murmurs, under cover of Nell’s demonstrations of friendship towards the landlady’s cat:

“ If you put yourself into that woman’s clutches you’ll never get out of them, Forrester ! And she’ll give you away any day to benefit herself.”

“ I must risk that,” Forrester says coolly, but his heart is hot within him, as he realizes for the first time that he is standing between the two fires of the old love and the new.



## CHAPTER IV.

“He either fears his fate to much  
Or his deserts are small  
Who dares not put it to the touch  
And win or lose it all.”

THE result of Captain Lisle's imprudent intervention, and of Major Forrester's relapse into a strong fit of loyalty and staunchness is, that the brother and sister go down to Hindringham alone, and the *Beau Sabreur* calls on Mrs. Ballantyne at four o'clock!

She is prepared for the contingency of his coming earlier than the time she had named, and is waiting, ready dressed, for her drive with her husband, as Major Forrester swings into the room. “Time rolls backward in his flight”—home and husband do not exist for her—happiness! only happiness! fills her whole being as she sees him again, almost unaltered, the



gallant soldier-lover whom she won and cheated and threw away !

If he wants revenge he has it this minute, as she fights with herself to conceal the joy his presence gives her—and fails !

“ You are good ! I know Captain Lisle tried to get you to go down to Norfolk with them to-day,” she begins impetuously,—“ you *are* good to have thought of me—and stayed.”

He drops her hand as she speaks, and draws himself up and away from her, though every impulse of his being prompts him to clasp her in his arms. But the *Beau Sabreur*, in spite of the reputation which scandal had affixed to him of “ loving whate’er he looks on ” and of “ taking whate’er he can,” has a good many old-fashioned chivalrous notions about honor and faith—and women ! So now, though he remembers vividly that he has wildly loved the woman in whose bewitching presence he now stands, and that she has reciprocated, he remembers also that he is in her husband’s house !

“ Could I have done less, Mrs. Ballan-



tyne ? ” he asks. “ It was too good to find that you hadn’t quite forgotten me, for me to throw away the chance of renewing our acquaintanceship. Lisle tells me how awfully good you’ve been to him : isn’t he a capital fellow ? ”

She lifts her slender foot half an inch from the floor, and brings it down with a passionate pressure that is more expressive than a stamp. If Captain Lisle had been under her heel at the moment, she would have loved to grind him to powder, for he has intervened. She feels he has intervened !

“ Why has Lisle done it ? ” she questions, and answers herself in the same breath. Not for love or even liking of her, of that she feels sure. Not even out of the friendly desire to keep her out of temptation. No ! She feels the reason. She arrives at the truth with the unfailing intuition of a clear-sighted clever woman. She knows that Lisle has intervened to save his friend out of a real, manly, honorable regard for that friend’s welfare.

“ I don’t think that Captain Lisle likes



me any better than I like him," she says incisively. "Captain Lisle likes his own way as well as I like mine, and his way just at present is to set you against me. Why is he doing it?"

"He is neither doing it, nor trying to do it. Even if he tried he would fail."

"He will try!"

Her ears are like those of a hare in their acuteness of hearing. Far along away a vista of drawing-room, ante-room, and hall she hears her husband's footsteps. He will come in immediately, and the opportunity of clearing herself with Harry Forrester will be gone forever.

"Stay!" she whispers passionately "don't go down to Norfolk. Stay and hear my vindication of myself. If you won't do this, I shall feel I have lost your respect."

"I will stay," he says, and then Mr. Ballantyne comes in, and Laura introduces her old love! her one "love" to her husband.

"This is *my* hour," Mr. Ballantyne says smiling. "I have promised my wife to



drive with her at five. I mustn't disappoint her. I am rarely able to give up any time to social and domestic duties during the day. This is one of the rare occasions on which I am fortunate enough to be able to do so."

Major Forrester is quite equal to the sudden strain made upon his endurance.

"Having made a random call I am fortunate in having found Mrs. Ballantyne at home—even for five minutes," he says quietly, and Mr. Ballantyne feels ashamed of some unnamed suspicion which he has been entertaining like an angel—unawares!

It is not material to the story that Mr. Ballantyne's character should be made manifest. Still, as a side-light, the suggestion may be thrown in that he is as good a man as ever walked God's earth. He is deeply imbued with real religious feeling. He is strictly moral. In money matters (he has never known the want of money in his life) he is above suspicion. Yet withal he is a hard nut to crack when it comes to living with him, for he is so faultless in



conduct himself that he makes those who dwell within his borders appear faulty.

Hitherto Laura has not suffered much—that is to say, she has never writhed under this quality of his. She has lived since her marriage a life of pleasure unleavened by a single real true feeling. The utter indifference to everything beyond the amusement which she can extract from them for the hour, which she displays to her intimate friends, both men and women, is so genuine a thing that Mr. Ballantyne has grown to take a kindly interest in these amusements. In fact he likes to see Laura have the lion's share of them. Away somewhere in the depths of his nature there is an unadmitted fear of and dislike to a man called Forrester, to whom gossip has told him—his wife was once engaged. Now, when he suddenly finds himself confronted by this very man without a word of preparation, or explanation, something springs into his heart which has never dwelt there before, and that “something,” though he does not know it yet, is jealousy.

There is a distinct touch of frostiness in



the atmosphere as he shakes hands with his wife's old friend. But Laura is a brave woman—with a deadly dear object to gain—and she determines that a thaw shall set in. So she crosses over to her husband's side and puts her hand on his as she stoops towards him, and whispers :

“Ask him to dinner, Tom? I won't give up my drive with you to stay and hear some of his adventures ; besides it will be pleasanter to have him to dinner—with Colonel Heathcote.”

Clearly Laura is only thinking, as usual,—of her current amusement: of this Mr. Ballantyne feels assured at once. If she had really desired to stay now and talk to Forrester instead of driving with him (her liege lord) he knows her plucky independent spirit would have prompted her to tell him so. As it is she merely wants Major Forrester to balance Heathcote at dinner! Feeling convinced of this, Mr. Ballantyne gives the required invitation, and Forrester, feeling that he is a feeble fool for doing so, accepts it!

(“I had far better have gone with Lisle



and his sister'') Major Forrester tells himself remorsefully that evening, as he steps from his hansom at the Ballantyne's door, and is conscious of a figure passing through it in front of him that vaguely recalls the form of an enemy to his mind. The vision is too transitory to make impression upon him, however, and it is not till he has been welcomed by his host and hostess that in the rosily dim light of the drawing room he recognizes distinctly the man whose hand he refused yesterday at the Club—his well-grounded favorite aversion, Colonel Heathcote !

That there is something wrong is obvious to Mrs. Ballantyne in a moment, for Major Forrester's head is aloft in the way she remembers so well when anything stirs or annoys him, and Colonel Heathcote bursts forth, too inconsequently to deceive anyone, into a jeremiad against some political action of the day. The acute woman of the world is not nonplussed for an instant. Crossing hastily to the further end of the long room she turns a lamp up before an easel on which is a recently painted



portrait of herself, and calls to Major Forrester to come and criticise it. As he gazes, now at it and now at her, she murmurs :

“I will make Mr. Ballantyne understand that this *rencontre* is unpleasant to you both, and will ask him to spare you both further embarrassment by suggesting that you join me here directly I leave the table.”

He looks gratefully at her as he nods assent. “Her tact was always perfect,” he remembers, and he is glad now that by her prompt exercise of the quality he will also be indulged in that dangerous delight, a *tete-a-tete* with her. Surely no other woman would have seen her way out of a grave social difficulty so cleverly and agreeably.

Even as he thinks this Laura is back with Mr. Ballantyne and Colonel Heathcote—smoothing both of them down.

“Tom, go over and show Major Forrester what you consider the defects in that portrait, and you, Colonel Heathcote, come to the conservatory with me while I make you a button-hole.” Then with a wonderfully well-managed eye-telegram addressed



to her husband she makes him understand that there is a difficulty between their two guests, and that they must not be permitted to come into collision. Presently Mr. Ballantyne finds himself in the position of an ally of his wife's former lover, and Colonel Heathcote is the proud possessor of a matchless tube-rose fastened into his coat by Laura's dainty fingers.

Two hours later Mr. Ballantyne and Colonel Heathcote are alone over their walnuts and their wine, for Major Forrester has received the considerate hint to join his hostess which she has prompted her husband to give.

She sits playing at knitting a silken sock when he comes in and stands resting his elbow on the mantel-piece opposite to her. But her fingers tremble so that she drops a stitch, and with an impatient exclamation puts the knitting down.

"I bless Colonel Heathcote for being here, and I bless the quarrel which has been the means of my having this little 'say' alone with you," she begins fervently. "It's



three years since you said good-bye to me. Do you remember that day ? ”

He is practical and self-possessed at starting. The only reply she gets to her suggestive reminder is :

“ I remember it very well. It was the hottest day in the hottest summer we’ve had for a quarter of a century.”

“ Tell me what you have been doing with yourself during these three years ? ” she asks very softly. Her spirit is being sorely exercised by what she really believes to be merely a show of indifference on his part. Still a show of indifference on the masculine side while on the feminine there is an open exhibition of real feeling is a trying thing for the woman. Laura is not one to stand this trial long in patience and silence. Even now, softly as she speaks, every nerve in her body is quivering with impatience.

“ Tell me what you have been doing with yourself during these three years ? ” she repeats, and then she adds entreatingly, “ I don’t want your service record, I know that by heart ! I only want to know—by



whom—by how many—I have been blotted out?”

“Your own hand wiped me off the canvas of your life. No other woman would have had the power to do it.”

“That’s a mere phrase—to put me off. Why won’t you treat me like the friend—like the sister I want to be to you now?” she pleads plaintively. “Why won’t you give me your confidence? Why won’t you tell me who the woman is who is making you indifferent to me now?”

“She does not exist,” he answers, coming over to the side of her chair. “Laura, you’re married to a very good fellow, and—I’m glad that I’ve seen you once more! But I shall not come here again. It’s just as well not to open an old wound.”

“You don’t care to see me again? is that what you mean? Because!—because, I have been a fool you won’t refuse to treat me as a friend will you?”

“It’s absurd to speak of friendship between us. It can’t exist! it must grow to something stronger! it has grown to something stronger already.”



“For the first time for three years I am *happy* again,” she whispers, and after that Major Forrester says no more about going away and never seeing her again.

Colonel Heathcote has a light attack of Malta fever that evening which incapacitates him from rejoining Mrs. Ballantyne in the drawing-room. He tells Mr. Ballantyne that he thinks he “had better slip off quietly and get to bed, as he can hardly hold his head up, and all his nerves are shaking with the pain.”

Unquestionably, something is making him shake and hang his head. Perhaps Major Forrester might give it another name than “Malta fever.”

“He won’t face me, he dare not put his fate to the touch and try to swagger into society in my presence,” Major Forrester says lightly when Mr. Ballantyne comes in with Colonel Heathcote’s apology for his abrupt departure. And they all laugh at the recalcitrant hero’s diplomacy, and little reck of the revenge which will, by the irony of fate, be put into his power to take upon the *Beau Sabreur*.



## CHAPTER V.

## HALF-MEASURES.

A WEEK has passed since Captain Lisle and his sister Nell went down to Hindringham, and still Major Forrester has not followed them.

For the first day or two after her return Nell has been frank enough to make the man of whom she is frequently thinking her theme. He has flashed like a meteor across her path, in the glory of the grandest physique she has ever seen—in the glory of the recently-written record of the most daring, plucky, and brilliant services of which she has ever read—and the radiancy of well-deserved popularity! To the majority of men in the service he is a hero. To the men in his own regiment he is an idol of whom they are proud as only soldiers can be of any officer who has rallied them from disaster and led them on to victory! To



society he is a lion; none the less a lion because he never roars about himself! What wonder that the warm heart of the girl has been won without an effort on the part of the man who was ready enough to make efforts to win it—before he again fell into the clutches of Laura Ballantyne.

But in the pernicious presence of this fascinating old love of his, Major Forrester has been letting his admiration and liking for Nell Lisle slide away into the limbo of half-forgotten things. For six days he has been in tolerably constant attendance on Mrs. Ballantyne, and, though never by word or action does he compromise either her or himself, the section of society in which he revolves begins to remind itself that he was her lover once!

There is a rumor that he will be sent to Malta soon, and Laura begins playing her cards cautiously in order that, if she does not win the game and make him her slave for life, no other woman shall have the honor of doing it. She enlarges on the benefit her health would derive from the waters of the blue Mediterranean, and ex-



patiates in as eloquent a way as if she meant it on the delights of yachting in blue, unclouded weather. If the rumor is well-founded and Major Forrester is sent to Malta with his regiment, no one can say when he gets the route that Mrs. Ballantyne has not proposed going there before he received his orders.

Speaking of the possibility of their parting one day, it comes to him to feel that he is on the brink of a precipice and that her hand is leading him on.

The sharp stab of pain which he feels at the prospect is succeeded by a dull ache that warns him that he has been playing with fire and got severely scorched. Beautiful as she is, fascinating, clever and thrilling as she is, he knows her to be, beneath the fair surface, a selfish, mercenary, fickle creature, who will never give him a hundredth part of the devotion and self-sacrificial love he is letting himself lavish on her. But she will tie him to her chariot-wheels and display him freely to other envious women as the captive of her bow and spear—while he is the prominent figure on



the canvas on which this portion of their respective lives is being painted. As it is her ambition to ride the handsomest and best bred horse, to be followed by the most magnificent specimens of doghood, and to wear the best built habits and dresses in London, so it is her ambition to have this martial Apollo, with his unbeaten modern record of services in the field and successes in athletic sports and military tournaments, in attendance on her. In fact, there is a good deal of human nature about Mrs. Ballantyne ; and, in spite of his knowledge of her and her motives, the essentially human side of his nature is taken and held by her—for a time.

Another course, too, conduces to a close intimacy between them besides vanity and love. Mrs. Ballantyne is as fearless and faultless a horsewoman as ever swung with perfect balance in the saddle ; and he on his barb, Beau, who carried him at Suakim, completely embodies the old idea of the Centaur, so absolutely are man and horse “one.” As may be surmised he is no more a park rider than he is a “carpet-knight”



To him the Row is a purgatorial and obnoxious place, and Mrs. Ballantyne, though she likes to exhibit him as her escort, surrenders to his distaste for it, and goes away for gallops over the turf at Richmond and wherever they can find a convenient bit of posts and rails—or from twelve to eighteen feet of water.

“Beau” is not only his favorite horse, but his favorite friend apparently—also his fixed idea, and one of the strongest sentiments of his life. Under any and all circumstances he considers the beautiful barb’s comfort and well-being before his own, and the horse loves him in return with a love and fidelity that passes the love of woman. Beau follows him like a dog, caresses him like a child, and would burst every blood-vessel in his gallant little body rather than not answer to the heaviest call made on him by the master whom he idolizes. In short, something of the Arab seems to have got into the man as well as the horse, so perfect a thing is the understanding, affection and union between the reckless soldier and his barb “Beau”.



They are down among some meadows near the Thames one day when they see a short cut into the road again, over a moderately high bank with a quickset hedge on the top of it. It is nothing for a flyer to take apparently. Major Forrester leads at an easy pace, and, rather to his surprise, he finds Beau flying through space. Looking down he sees a deep gully from which clay has been quarried out, fourteen or fifteen feet deep and ten or twelve wide. Beau, with his legs laid flat to him clears it, and Forrester has time to hold up his whip in warning as he wheels round and stop Mrs. Ballantyne with a shout.

“Don’t come, for God’s sake !—I’ll come back,” he cries, and Laura has time to pull her mare on to its haunches in the very moment of take-off. For, though she is a plucky woman and would ride at anything he told her to go for, the instincts of a horsewoman teach her that the dictum of the Beau Sabreur is not to be disobeyed where riding is concerned.

“It was a near thing that Beau and I didn’t go into that infernal trap of a puny



ravine," he says when he has described the jump to her.

"And if you had, you'd have been killed probably?" she questions.

"It would most likely have been a case of a broken back for one or both of us."

"What should I have done, I wonder?" she says, then adds with fell frankness, "I feel *now* as if I should have gone after you! But perhaps if the worst had come to the worst, I should have made the best of my way home. One can never answer for oneself, you know! But Harry! I *am* glad such an agonizing alternative was not offered to me."

"I'd give my life for you any day, and you know it," he tells her. Before he can add "that he is not worth it! that she should risk her life or anything she values for him," she has reined up close to him and is asking beseechingly.

"Promise me, promise me, that you won't let Lisle get you down to Norfolk. I guess, though you've never told me, that he set his sister on to persuade you to go, and



I couldn't bear it if her persuasions carried the day against mine."

"You don't know what you're asking. I'm no saint, only a man; and I can't stand—I won't have half-measures about anything that I set my heart on. You had better let me go."

She has no direct answer to make to this. Laura is a woman who can be discreet and silent whenever it suits her purpose to be so, in spite of those occasional lapses into "fell frankness" which have been mentioned. So now when Major Forrester says stoutly, almost savagely, that he "will have no half-measures," and that "she had better let him go,"—she only says:

"There were no half-measures in the way Beau and you went for that bank and the unknown quantity of ditch the other side of it. It *was* a splendid flyer. I revel in seeing you do things that other men shirk."

"Any fellow equally well-mounted with myself would have gone for it," he says carelessly. But he likes the subtle flattery she has infused into her words. He likes



to feel that she admires his power and pluck as much as he admires her grace and charm and the face and figure that he thinks so beautiful ! So, though he deprecates the flattery, he is amenable to all its subtlety, especially to that portion of it which touches Beau.

Once turned loose on that broad borderland where Beau's interest and sympathies and his own meet and unite indissolubly, and Major Forrester forgets for the time every other man, woman and beast in the world.

All vanish into an atmosphere of indifference while he enlarges on the well-loved theme of how he first knew, loved and annexed Beau, the faultlessly shaped, gray, broad-crested barb with the Khedive's mark on him !

That the gallant little horse responds is evident.

“ One eye's black intelligence ever that glance  
O'er it's white rim looks back at its master askance,”

as they trot smartly back from the green slopes by the river to the dry and dusty



town. When they pull up at her door, Laura bends down to say good-bye to him—till they meet at a fashionable haunt later on, to which she has, much against his will, secured him an invitation.

“Thank Heaven you didn’t go down into that horrid gulley, Harry,” she murmurs, “If you had——”

“Thank Heaven we didn’t, for Beau might have been hurt——” he interrupts simply, and he looks at the horse as he says it, in a way that makes Laura feel that she is not the one object in life to him yet.

When he has seen Beau groomed till his satin skin might serve for a looking-glass—when the clean legs, and long, elastic pasterns, have been dry-rubbed till they glow, and the feet have been cleaned out of all possibility of the thrush entering into them, Major Forrester saunters into his hotel, bent solely on getting rid of the time between now and meeting Laura again. But letters have arrived by the later post which alter his views. One is from a brother officer at Plymouth saying briefly:

“Lucky you’re on leave. Heathcote’s to



be our new colonel. Put in for Egypt; he won't stay with us long, and it's as well you shouldn't meet."

The other is from Captain Lisle, reminding him that he is still due—an invited guest who has accepted the invitation at Hindringham.

The defiant side of his nature turns uppermost, as he reads the first letter. Why on earth should he put in for Egypt for the purpose of avoiding old Heathcote? Not a bit of it. He makes up his mind that as soon as his leave is up he will go back to the regiment, and do everything he can, short of violating his duty and service rules, to make Heathcote understand that he fears him no more than he loves him. The gallant colonel is physically and on principle averse to all those deeds of darkness which are done under the name of military or athletic sports for amusement. Feats of swordsmanship Colonel Heathcote loathes. In defence of his country, he has been heard to avow, he would use his sword with the best; likewise his rifle, carbine and other munitions of war with



which cruel service Fate has burdened him. But some way or other he has always been out of the way when his country has needed these lusty services of his. Major Forrester smiles with a subtle sense of the humor of the thing as he pictures himself and Beau tent-pegging as they have done dozens of times before in the barrack-square.

The other letter—the one from Lisle gives him such a pull up in his career of frenzied friendship with Mrs. Ballantyne that he wires off at once to say : that he will be at Hindringham to-morrow. Having done this he revolts at and rounds on himself for being disloyal to Laura. So he goes in rather a moody frame of mind to his tryst with her this night, where Laura, who hates moody frames of mind, diverts herself exceedingly, a little by petting him in private, and by trying to make him publicly jealous of a Champagne-shouldered guardsman with something fabulous a year.

“I hear that fellow Forrester is here,” the guardsman says to Laura, “I’d like to know him. They say he’s a crack swords-



man. I go in for that kind of thing a little myself, you know."

"I know at Aldershot last year you beat every one in the sword-against-sword, didn't you?"

"I beat the one man who tried against me. He was very fair, indeed, a man in the line, you know, a fellow called Brown. Naturally a cavalry man ought to take the cake in such a contest."

"Major Forrester is in a line regiment, you know," she says sweetly. "Some day I may have the pleasure of seeing you try sword-against-sword with him; I hope I may! *How* I hope I may."

"Who's your friend, Mrs. Ballantyne?" Major Forrester asks, some five minutes afterwards, when Laura with a pathetic glance brings him to her side.

"Oh! he's a nice young man who does a lot of things in your line. You've heard of him of course? He's a crack shot and crack swordsman and a crack rider—Captain Kelly—a Guardsman!"

"I'll try conclusions with him before long; he's a regular boasting young ban-



tam-cock," Forrester says laughingly. Whereat Laura smiles applaudingly, and avers that it is the one object of her life at present to see him try those conclusions and beat Captain Kelly at every point.

The two men are introduced to each other presently by the fair being who aspires to be the arbitress of the destinies of both. Involuntarily and unconsciously they conceive the sort of aversion to one another which only sport and women can create between men who feel they may be in rivalry one day.

The guardsman has this slight advantage—that he dances well—over Major Forrester, who does not dance at all, and Laura likes revolving in his arms before an appreciative crowd. Consequently before many minutes the band of the Blue Hungarians clanging out the most entrancing waltzes of the season rouses all the dancing blood in Mrs. Ballantyne and Captain Kelly, and Forrester is left stranded in a shady corner in solitude to moan over the fatuousness of his action in coming here at all.

“She’s ready to chuck me for a human



tee-totum," he tells himself bitterly. Then, a little out of jealousy, and still more out of the strong aversion he has to being crossed or baffled in anything, he gets himself away from the scene of his discomfiture abruptly, regardless of the efforts other people make to detain him.

His Gladstone is soon packed, and he starts by an early train the next day for Hindringham with Beau in the horse-box and a perfectly mannered, pure-minded, evil-faced Bull-dog "Rush" surreptitiously concealed under his window-corner seat.



## CHAPTER VI.

## NELLSAYS NOTHING.

HINDRINGHAM is a house in which everyone, from the lord-lieutenant of the county to the stable cat, feels thoroughly at home. Mr. Lisle himself has one of those expansive, easy-going natures that tide a man like a cork over the waves of this troublesome world, and his wife is just enough in subjection to him to color her conduct so as to harmonize with his. This at least she does as a rule. But she has exceptional moods of diversity of opinion sometimes chiefly on the scores of conventionality and propriety. When these moods are upon her she becomes very vigilant about her husband's only sister Nell, and then there is what Nell describes to some of her girl intimates as "ructions at Hindringham."

Before Major Forrester has been there



many hours he feels himself to be one of the family. The master of the house has sporting proclivities which are entirely in sympathy with those of his new guest. Mr. Jack, who has never seen Forrester before, is touched by the air of flattering deference and suppressed admiration which is his normal manner to every pretty woman he meets. Nell likes him intensely, and shows her liking openly. Likes him for the dash in his manner which is called swagger—likes him for the personally gallant things he has done. Likes him for what is intrinsically good in his character. Likes him in spite of his surface faults of thoughtlessness, improvidence, unreasonableness when his desires are thwarted, impetuosity and quickly kindled temper. Likes him for those looks and that physique which neither artists nor women can ever behold with indifference. And last, but not by any means least, likes him because he reciprocates the liking.

She has been well taught, in a series of unconsciously given lessons by her brother Sydney, to have and to hold sentiments of



admiring appreciation for the Beau Sabreur.

To do her justice she has proved an apt pupil. From Syd's generous, exhaustive version of it, she could write Major Forrester's service record far more graphically and brilliantly than it has ever been written in the cut-and-dried reports of the military journals. But for all her power of hero-worshipping, she is no blind idolater. She does not extenuate—and certainly sets down naught in malice—when she is called upon to pronounce an opinion on some of those innumerable escapades of his which he has left like a trail behind him. Escapades, harmless enough to others, but charged with explosive matter that may sometime or other contribute to his own downfall, if touched by the hand of an enemy. Escapades, which, like most other things, lend themselves to vastly different modes of treatment—which his friends laugh at, half applaudingly, even while they tremble for the ultimate result—which his foes laugh at without any applause whatever in their mirth, as they prognosticate with humane hearti-



ness that "if he's only given rope enough he's bound to hang himself in the end."

Nell is not one of these latter, you may be sure. Nor, on the other hand, will she applaud and encourage him in those bursts of hot, haughty temper which have led him at times to take summary revenge on those who have roused it by trickery, social fraud, or wrong.

"It would have been more dignified as well as wiser to have handed him over to the police instead of knocking him down"—she tells him, when in the simple belief that he had been within his rights, he narrates how he has given a Welsher condign punishment on a local race-course.

But though she blames for this and similar displays of hot-headedness and imprudence, she cannot in her heart do anything but admire and forgive the sinner whose sins are, after all, those of a noble nature—imperfectly tamed!

Mrs. Jack and her sister-in-law have strolled out into the cool entrance hall one morning, and, there standing on the top of the steep flight of steps leading down into



the garden, Major Forrester sees them, as he rides up the drive. He waves a yellow envelope towards them, and Nell's heart, which has been bounding with joy at the mere sight of him a moment before, goes down with a sad, prophetic thud.

"He's got his orders to go, Nina! I feel sure it's that," she mutters to Mrs. Jack, and the latter, who is always impatient to know every new fact concerning all with whom she comes in contact cries out:

"Come up at once, Major Forrester, and tell us your news."

He obeys her behest implicitly. Without pausing to consider how he is to get down again, he turns Beau's head straight at the steps, and at a touch from his master's hand the gallant little horse climbs them like a cat.

"You shouldn't have been so silly as to ride up—are those your orders to go?" Mrs. Jack scolds and inquires in a breath, and he steals a look at Nell's flushed, anxious face as he answers:

"Not so bad as that yet, thank God. It's only a wire from one of our fellows to tell



me that our old Colonel retires and Heathcote's to succeed him. Where's Sydney? he will understand what I feel about this pleasing intelligence."

"Don't you like Colonel Heathcote? and how are you going to get Beau down again?" Mrs. Jack asks. "If you take him through the house the steps at the back are just as bad, and the windows are all too high and too narrow for him to get through. It was wicked of you to ride him up."

"You called to me to come up at once," he says reproachfully.

"But couldn't you have stayed to get off?"

"I never thought of that," he says simply, "you called me and I came—I wanted to tell you and Nell at once that mine enemy has got the upper hand of me so far as his being my commanding officer. Sydney always says Heathcote will have me on the hip one day; he'll have plenty of chances now."

He laughs loudly and merrily, and Nell is sorry to hear this defiant mirth. With his head held up, his eyes sparkling, partly with anger, and partly with amusement,



and his mouth set in its fiercest curve, he looks too godly and too gallant for any ignominious evil to overtake him. Something of this is in Nell's mind as she comes nearer, and puts her hand on Beau's grand crest and hog mane, and says :

“ You're not a boy to kick against the pricks, when the pricks are set in rightful authority over you. I've no doubt your grievance against Colonel Heathcote is more than half imaginary. Now, how are you going to get Beau down ? Get off and lead him.”

“ I'll get down as I came up,” he says, and as he speaks he touches Beau with the spurs, and the little gray barb who, in addition to the heart of a lion and the agility of a cat, must have the wings of an eagle hidden somewhere, leaps down into the hard drive as lightly as a feather and gallops along to recover himself as brilliantly as if he had not received the slightest shock in landing.

“ I detest foolhardiness ! If he tries to break his own neck and Beau's again, I hope he won't do it before me. Why Nell !



You're looking as red and delighted as if he had done something fine. No one with a scrap of prudence would have done it."

"No one with a scrap of prudence would be a bit like Major Forrester or do a single thing he does or has done under any circumstances."

"Now he's coming back to get his reward for his silliness," Mrs. Jack says, with a ring of laudation in her voice which she cannot silence. "Don't look so absurdly proud of him, Nell. Supposing he does it again and breaks his neck, you'll admit then that I'm his best friend in telling him that I think such show-off tricks idiotic."

"It's not show-off," Nell says, with unwonted energy, "it is that he does whatever he wants to do at the moment without stopping to think. He wanted to give us the news directly, so he took the quickest way about it."

"It's so like you to say that, Nell! Even Sydney says you use the whip and spur on Forrester and urge him on to do mad things by that way you have of sympathizing exultantly with him, and then you give him



a feed of corn at the end. Take my advice, Nell. Don't fall in love with him; if you do he'll break your heart either before you're married to him or after. He's bound to do it. Other women will like him as well as you do, and Harry Forrester will always respond to the present woman. My dear child, don't look, as if you could slay me. I'm a married woman, and Jack tells me lots of things that you never dream of. Sydney is as fond of Major Forrester as one man can be of another, but I think when it comes to you that even Syd will admit that your golden god has clay feet."

Nell turns a triumphant, laughing face to her sister-in-law for inspection at the end of this tirade.

"Do I look like one of those simple, easily-withered flowers that rapacious man finds, gathers, and throws away in his passage through the wilderness?" she asks blithely.

"No, you don't!" Mrs. Jack concedes with affected unwillingness. "Dear Nell, I'm bound to grumble, and moralize and warn, and all the rest of it, sometimes. I



declare I wouldn't do it," says the frank little worldling, "if our faulty, fascinating friend would even diplomatize with those who have the Mammon of unrighteousness, though he has none of it himself. Are you listening?"

Nell lifts herself erect from her lounging position on the balustrades that stretch out from either side of the steps.

"I'm not listening to you, Nina, dear. I'm listening for Major Forrester's step. He said he was coming back directly. Do you think Beau's legs got jarred? Let us walk round to the stables and see."

Mrs. Jack is kindheartedness itself.

"I want to go and look at my own mare, come along," she says promptly, but as they take their leisurely way to the stables the sense of responsibility fills her soul again, and makes her vacillate.

"If you won't take my advice and just like, *pour passer le temps*, and nothing more, Nell—if you really insist on trying to win him—don't try and emulate his daredevilry and fool-hardiness, even in theory. Such men infinitely prefer timid, womanly



women !—I assure you they do, dear Nell. They don't want us to do equally daring things with themselves. I've never found that Jack thinks the less of me because I'm nervous."

"You dear Nina! how good of you to instruct me in the art of winning the Major Forrester of this world." Nell laughs happily, for at this moment Major Forrester rejoins them. Mrs. Jack, finding the sun "too glaring and the atmosphere too sultry," goes in to the shade of her own room. Nell stays out on the terrace steps and unconsciously drives another nail into the coffin in which he is trying to bury his dead love for Mrs. Ballantyne, by lauding Beau's latest exploit in the jumping line.

Over and over again during the immediately ensuing days Major Forrester is nearly over the brink of a declaration of love and an offer of marriage to the girl who at times treats him like a brother, and at other times holds aloof from him as if he were dangerous. She understands him well enough to know that if he wants her he will ask for her outright, in spite



of that cramping lack of red, red gold from which he suffers. She understands equally well, and knows that she is as ready to marry him on nothing but his pay, as if he had the wealth of the Rothschilds at command. Further! she understands that he *does* want her! Yet he does not ask for her! What is the hindrance?

Her brother Sydney could answer this question if she had asked it of him, and he pleased! But she does not ask Sydney, and if she did it would not please Sydney to tell *all* the truth. So she remains still in blissful ignorance of the existence of the fair bane of the Beau Sabreur's life.

Meantime Laura, remembering that absence makes the heart grow fonder of—"somebody else" as a rule, sends Major Forrester gentle reminders of herself in the shape of harmless little notes that might be published on the house-tops. If Forrester had been the happy husband of a hundred wives these notes might have fallen into the hands of every one of them without causing one jealous pang in a single wifely breast. Nevertheless they



were full of meaning, full of suggestions of rocks ahead to the man who knew the writer of them better than he knew himself.

These harmless little notes have more to do with that deferred hope of Helen Lisle's than Forrester is conscious of himself. They remind him of the woman who writes them so vividly that he cannot go and ask Nell to be his wife while they are burning holes in his various pockets. For after the perniciously careless habit of man he leaves them first on his dressing-table for several days until the housemaids have had time to master their contents. Then in a sudden access of caution he puts them into the pockets of any garment he may happen to be wearing, where they lie forgotten and left to crumple away forlorn, he being too sentimental or too thoughtless to destroy them.

The days go by swiftly, fraught with monotonous happiness to Harry Forrester and Nell. Captain Lisle's leave expires, and he has to rejoin his regiment, leaving the relations between his sister and his friend still unexplained.



These are wonderful days for Nell. He is always by her side and openly at her feet, and all the women envy her her comely splendid lover. "It can only end in one way," every one says who sees them together and marks his frank adoration and her gloriously honest acceptance of it.

"You'll always be poor, Nell, buy a sewing machine now while you have a little money of your own and learn to knit stockings, and cut out your own dresses from as little cloth as possible. Poverty of course will have a halo thrown around it by the beauty and broad-shoulders of your companion—" Mrs. Jack pulls herself up in her attempt at banter, for tears have come into Nell's eyes.

"He's as much afraid of poverty as you are, Nina," she says despondently, "or at least he's more afraid of *something* than I am, for he won't be imprudent for once in his life. He's been foolish enough to fall in love with me, but he won't ask me to marry him. So *do* let me have the feverish happiness of being with him, and



thinking that it's as great happiness for him as for me without molesting me a *little* longer, dear."

It is a fact that there is a good deal of feverish happiness for both of them in this half-doubtful, half-certain condition of things between a man and a girl—provided it does not last too long! A little of the effervescence of the romance is brushed off when it is openly bruited abroad to the world that any two people belong to one another and that any one caught straying on their respective preserves will be regarded as trespassers, and punished accordingly. But during the preliminary stage there is always the possibility of an interloper justifiably presuming to loiter on to the primrose path which is being trodden by the unacknowledged lovers. The possibility gives the affair a zest which is often lacking in a hard-and-fast engagement, and makes each of them unconsciously exert themselves to retain that which they have won.

The crisis comes at last and Beau—the beautiful barb who has become part and



parcel of his master's life very properly since those hot days of danger and the delights attendant on danger to such a nature as Forrester's—Beau is the means of bringing it about.

There is a meeting at Yapham three miles from Hindringham and Major Forrester enters his favorite for the Yapham Handicap value fifty guineas. Beau has to carry a penalty of seven pounds on account of former successes, and is to be ridden by a born ( but undeveloped ) Jockey in the person of the " Spider " a shrewd stable-lad in Mr. Lisle's employ, who Major Forrester has discovered—has the " hand of a woman and the seat of a leech."

The course is nearly all ploughed—but a field of clover, and a drop into an awkward lane have to be crossed twice in the running. The meeting is essentially a local one. The stand and rising ground are full of farmers who have heard of " the Major's wonderful barb," and who go into the ring and " plunge " upon Beau readily and flatteringly. The Spider is hastily getting himself into Major Forrester's colors—



“brown and old gold”—when the saddling-bell ceases abruptly. The field—consisting of five other horses, one of whom “Devilskin,” had been the favorite until Beau was entered—are ready to be “away” when the flag drops, as it does in a minute, and they are off fifty yards ahead of Beau before the Spider has got his foot in the off stirrup. The Spider’s leech-like qualities come in conveniently here. Beau rushes after his vanishing rivals before the stirrup difficulty is adjusted. At the second fence he gains his lost ground, slips past Devilskin and leads the field. He passes the stand the first time several lengths ahead of everything—Spider with his face black-red, his cap off, and his off stirrup still at variance with his foot! As they breast the hill on the far side of the course in the last round a clever cat of a mare makes futile efforts to close with Beau, but when he hears the mare rattling behind him he tosses his head and bolts worse than ever. He crosses the road at such a rate that even Major Forrester starts and utters an exclamation feeling sure that Beau



must charge the fence and break both Spider's neck and his own. But the Spider has nerve and remembers his instructions. He sits still ! is landed into the last field but one safely, and Beau romps in the winner by a dozen lengths.

If the V.C. for which he has been recommended, and out of which he has been curiously kept by some occult means, had been given to him this moment Major Forrester could not feel a more hearty honest thrill of pride and pleasure than he does in this exploit which his renowned little horse has accomplished. He pets and thanks and praises Beau as if human intelligence and a human heart were in the barb's beautiful lithe head and superbly strong little body, and Nell Lisle touches the root of one of his deepest feelings sympathetically when she says : —

“ If I see much more of Beau I shall love him as a brother— ”

“ You may see as much of Beau for the rest of his life as you like, it rests with you whether you have him for your own or not— ” he is replying, when Nell, out of



happy nervous excitement interrupts to her own detriment :

“No, no! Beau might reciprocate and get so fond of me that you might grow jealous. Own it: You couldn’t bear it to see Beau fond of anyone but yourself?”

“Beau’s part of myself, therefore he can’t help being fond of you,” Major Forrester is saying, and the climax has nearly come, when Mrs. Lisle averts it.

“Major Forrester,” she cries running up with a dull yellow envelope in her hand “here’s a telegram for you—sent on from Hindringham.” Then, half aside, she adds “Nell! you shouldn’t—you really shouldn’t have left us all to come and help Major Forrester canonize Beau. To hear him and see you one would think that Beau was a prodigy, and you two were its parents.”

Before Nell can answer Major Forrester cuts in to the conversation. He speaks very quietly, but there is not the customary elation in either his voice or manner when he says :—

“My orders have come to join the first



battalion at Malta at once. I must leave you this evening, Mrs. Lisle."

"It's too horridly sudden," Nina says affably; "we shall all be so sorry, shan't we, Nell?"

But Nell says nothing.



## CHAPTER VII.

## MRS. LINLEY CUTS TO CURE.

BYRON graphically paints some of the characteristics of Malta in those lines beginning :—

“Adieu ye joys of La Valette,  
Adieu, Sir occo, sun and sweat,  
Adieu, ye cursed streets of stairs,  
How surely he who mounts you swears!”

but he leaves some of its chief delights untouched.

It is an earthly Paradise for that large section of the human race who find their dearest delight on earth in carrying on to a more or less compromising degree with “other fellows’ wives” and other women’s husbands—or lovers, as the case may be. In fact if there be an Elysium on earth for the married women who pine for the excitement of conquest, or the more dangerous triumph of winning and returning a real love, it is Malta.



Mrs. Ballantyne has carried out her programme to the letter. She has had a little fit of depression of health and spirits—a little contest with her doctor who has insisted on ordering her to spend some time in the south—and a really earnest and interesting discussion with her husband as to the most likely spot in which to autumn and winter. Finally she settles the question by suddenly remembering that an old friend of hers—the wife of a commander in the navy—is resident in Malta, while her husband is on the Mediterranean station. “A dear, nice, good, quiet, sensible woman,” she tells Mr. Ballantyne, “just the sort of woman you would like to see me intimate with, Tom. I shall be quite happy in dear, lazy, luxurious Malta if I have her companionship even if I have no other amusement.”

Whether Mr. Ballantyne believes this admirable sentiment or not is a detail. He inquires the name of his wife’s friend, remarks that “it’s a good one” when she tells him it is “Douglas”, and proceeds to make arrangements for the hire of a yacht, and the transmission of his wife and himself to



Malta without delay. He is rather pleased, in fact, that Laura is so willing to leave England just now. It proves to him conclusively that she has no idle sentiment hanging about her concerning Major Forrester, who will (Mr. Ballantyne understands) be quartered at Plymouth for some time. Before he is undeceived on this latter point they are installed in a palatial residence on terms that appear sordidly low to the rich Englishman. Laura's health begins to improve, likewise her spirits, and their yacht, the *Banshee*, is one of the first objects that greet Major Forrester's eyes when he arrives in the harbor in the trooper *Tamar*.

She has nothing to fear in writing to him, accordingly a letter apprising him of her whereabouts is put into his hands as soon as he lands. Mrs. Ballantyne does not "give herself away" even to him. She pleads her "health" as the reason why she is here at all, and dwells with charming frankness on the "surprise and delight" she felt when she saw his name in the list of passengers on board the *Tamar*. Perhaps he does not quite credit the implica-



tion that her being here is a coincidence, nothing more ! But it is certain that there is much more pleasure than pain to him in the fact of her being so near to him—so attainable, so ready to render to him the gracious, flattering homage which the heart of a man can't help enjoying from a woman whom he either loves, admires, or likes intensely.

Mr. Ballantyne is away for a week's cruise in the *Banshee* when Major Forrester in reply to her note calls on the woman who is already known as the prettiest in Malta. Shaded from the fervid heat of the burning, blood-heating sun, they lounge away the drowsy hours by a window that gives upon steps leading down to an orange grove where bloom and fruit in profusion are in every stage of growth from the tiny bud to the luxurious ripe orange. She leaning back in a cool deck chair that adapts itself to every one of her indolently graceful movements ! He—metaphorically if not physically—at her feet !

He dines with her, finding the quails that have been driven over to their destruction,



by the fierce sirocco wind that blew awhile ago, food for the gods, because eaten in her presence; finding the thin wine mounting to his head in a way no potent draught would have done had *she* not been there; finding, in short, that to look at this woman by his side, to hear her low-toned words, to be the object of her sweet, subtle flatteries is as near an approach to Heaven upon earth as he may ever hope or wish to attain unto.

They saunter down some streets of steps to the Opera house after dinner, she with some lace arranged mantilla-fashion over her head, and he in the light morning-suit he had dressed himself in to call upon her. The fatiguing onus is not laid upon them of arranging themselves in fuller dress for the opera than has sufficed for that little dinner which they have enjoyed together.

The simplicity of her attire enables them to walk—as everybody else does in this heavenly climate—to the entertainment which is as exquisitely rendered as the costliest of its kind would be in London, and their musical and spectacle-loving



tastes are gratified at a price that would only command a seat in the gallery in our superior metropolis.

A new singer, a *Diva* who has just arrived with a flourish of Fame's trumpets from Italy, makes her first appearance to-night. The Admiral and the General, their respective families and *suites*, are there to hear and do her homage, and all that is best and brightest, fastest and finest in Malta society bears them company.

As Mrs. Ballantyne and her escort enter, the whole house pays her the same compliment it had paid the *Diva* ten minutes before. Every eye turns in her direction, every glass that dares to do so is leveled at her for an instant, and withdrawn before Major Forrester has time to scowl defiance at the audacity. The wife of the colonel of one of the regiments on its way out to India happens to have taken up her quarters in a suite of rooms in the same palazzo as that in which Mrs. Ballantyne is located, so, recognizing the lady of whom she has already caught a glimpse, she



bends forward and gives information to her husband, who is divided from her by some of Malta's biggest officials in the following words:

"The Ballantynes have just come in! d'ye see? He's been yachting, and is just back, I suppose? Splendid pair they are, are they not, Colonel Heathcote—they're in the same house with me—"

"Mrs. Ballantyne has just come in," Colonel Heathcote interrupts gruffly. "The fellow with her is Forrester of 'ours.' Ballantyne is a nice, quiet, gentlemanly-looking fellow, quite a different stamp of fellow altogether."

Mrs. Linley listens to the letter of this explanation, and fathoms the spirit of it. So, as he is a superficially kind and comparatively rich man, she, as the mother of a large family of children who are always craving for something which she has neither the means nor the inclination to supply them with, set herself the pleasing Christian task of soothing him.

"Mrs. Ballantyne is courting destruction," she says lightly. "I have heard from many



people how staunch a friend you have been to that silly, giddy woman for years—”

“Her father was a friend of mine—when I was a boy,” he adds hurriedly, fearing that Mrs. Linley may draw the not unnatural deduction that Laura’s father and he had been contemporaries.

“Exactly! so I have always understood, therefore it must be all the more annoying to you to see her making herself conspicuous with such a man as Major Forrester,” Mrs. Linley chimes in with prompt sympathy. It may be remarked in passing that Mrs. Linley knows absolutely nothing for or against Mrs. Ballantyne’s handsome escort, but she (Mrs. Linley) sees that he is an object of distaste, if not of actual aversion to Colonel Heathcote, accordingly she deems it highly probable that she will score in speaking of Forrester as “such a man” in disparaging accents.

Colonel Heathcote allows the precious ointment of her words to heal his wounded vanity. He looks approvingly at Mrs. Linley for the first time this evening, and resolves that he will “drop in the following



day and see those nice children of hers.” As he thinks this he says :

“To do Mrs. Ballantyne justice she is quite innocent of encouraging Major Forrester’s attentions. I know her so well that I can answer for it that she would infinitely prefer being without him to having him by her side.”

Colonel Heathcote has chosen an unfortunate moment for making this assertion. Mrs. Linley darts a comprehensive gleam at the pair under discussion, and sees Mrs. Ballantyne looking up into the face of the man who is bending over her with that look which a woman is not apt to bestow upon one who bores her and whom she desires to see depart from her borders. The desire to punish old Heathcote for his fatuous preference for Laura to herself seizes Mrs. Linley and causes her to say with acidity:

“If she would prefer being without him, she has a wonderfully contrary way of showing her wishes. She is either a nasty, shallow, vain coquette, or she’s over head-and-ears in love with your handsome Major.”

“Oh! you do her injustice, indeed you



do," Colonel Heathcote protests vigorously. He cannot bear to hear it affirmed that any woman—much less Laura—is over head-and-ears in love with any man but himself.

"I can assure you," he goes on earnestly, "that Mrs. Ballantyne is quite a model wife, devoted to that good fellow Ballantyne—"

"So I should suppose," Mrs. Linley interposes dryly.

"Quite devoted to him. Ballantyne's a great friend of mine, by the way ; a most excellent fellow. Mrs. Ballantyne is far too clever a woman to be led away by the superficial attractions of a fellow like Forrester."

"Oh! I don't know about that!" Mrs. Linley says, shaking her head slowly in grave, well-balanced deliberation. "I don't know about that. The cleverest women have hearts and fancies and eyes, and Major Forrester must appeal to all three. How proud you must all be of him in your regiment," she goes on, determined to give it to him well for his "idiotic infatuation" for the brilliant woman opposite, who has never given one glance at him or to anyone else,



save Major Forrester, from the moment she entered the house.

“I don’t think our pride in him over-balances our judgment,” Colonel Heathcote says ; “it strikes me that the regiment would get on quite as well without him as with him. He’s an extravagant fellow without the means to justify extravagance—”

“One doesn’t measure such a man’s doings with an inch-rule,” Mrs. Linley smiles tentatively. “Come, Colonel Heathcote ! search your memory and tell me the truth ? —Weren’t you a little bit extravagant in the days of your youth ?”

“If I was, I had the parental power of the purse at my back,” Colonel Heathcote grunts, and Mrs. Linley lays the last straw upon him by saying softly :

“Poor fellow ! and hasn’t he ? I am so sorry to hear it. He looks like a duke with twenty thousand a year at least.”

“He has to duke it on his pay and the twenty thousand devils by whom he’s possessed,” Colonel Heathcote growls in extreme exasperation. “Women are all alike, I find ; self-sufficiency, a few social sins



and swagger are sure to win their suffrages."

"I can be alliterative too," the lady laughs, "in Major Forrester's case I think it's beauty, broad shoulders, brains, and breeding that win our suffrages! Why the opera's over! Hasn't it been a delightful one. I have enjoyed it so much. Come and see me to-morrow. My children will be so delighted to see their old Portsmouth friend again."

"I'll come, certainly, with pleasure," Colonel Heathcote promises grimly. But to himself he adds:

"Not one pound of nougat shall that wretched woman's children get out of me. What the devil took Mrs. Ballantyne out in such a hurry? That fellow must have been afraid that she'd want to stay and speak to me."

Before many more days are over their heads, Major Forrester's reputation for success in all things in which he cares to be successful has increased and strengthened. Beau has won the first prize at the races, and his two Polo ponies are not only unequalled in their special profession, but are



the most perfect tandem pair on the Island, "or any where else" Forrester himself rather broadly declares. The seniors in the regiment shake their heads ominously as the smart turn-out concentrates the attention of all the Beauty, Fashion and Valor in Malta upon itself day after day. But though heads are shaken, nothing occurs to justify the despondent gesture. The three ponies win more at races, shows, and gymcanas in the course of a month than is sufficient to keep them in high condition for twelve. There is an armed neutrality between their master and the Colonel, and Rush has not bitten a native Maltese yet—a catastrophe Colonel Heathcote prays for daily, in order that he may have a valid excuse for dismissing a dog from the Barracks who makes life a burden to him whenever they meet on parade.

Not that Rush has ever snapped or even growled at the Chief. But the brindle bulldog has the same unhappy faculty for expressing dislikes as characterizes his master. He (Rush) walks more stiffly, and the normal expression of proper pride in himself,



tempered with piety, intensifies itself on his face whenever he meets Colonel Heathcote. "That beast and I will have a clear understanding soon, the Colonel promises himself one day when Rush has stalked past him with a peculiarly insulting glance. "His infernal ponies and confounded horn are bad enough, dashing over every thing and maddening you with its noise. But this brute of a wild-beast is worst of all with his beastly insolent jowl and bloated broad back. I wish he'd bite a native that I might make an end of him. However, my fine fellow, we'll try conclusions soon!" he adds threateningly to Rush, who is calmly obstructing the entrance to the mess-room, looking very much as if he thought it might be well to dispute the Colonel's entrance into it.

Major Forrester is in the mess-room, smoking a cherished little common clay pipe on which he cut the word "Suakim" when the work was at its warmest there one day, and he was making himself a target for the hidden Arabs' fire, in order that they might betray the place of their concealment. This pipe is almost as irritating a spectacle



as its owner or Rush to Colonel Heathcote, who unadvisedly throws down the glove by saying:

“Keep that brute of a bull-dog of yours in your own quarters, Major Forrester. He’s obstructing the entrance. He snarled at me as I came in.”

Major Forrester takes his little pipe deliberately out of his mouth, empties it, puts it into its case with dainty solicitude, and then says, as if he had only just remembered that his Colonel has addressed him:—

“Snarled at you, did he? I’ve never known Rush snarl at a gentleman.”

The four or five other men who are in the room lounge out with as unconscious an air as they can command. If a row is imminent they have no desire to be present at it. For a few minutes the two men sit alone looking at each other. Then Colonel Heathcote reminds himself that to have a mess-room row with a junior will be *infra dig*. So he makes his exit through another door than the one Rush is decorating, and Harry Forrester’s longing to have it out with his unavowed foe is baffled for a time.



## CHAPTER VIII.

NO HERO —BUT —A DOG!

THE day is a heavenly one. The sky and the sea are rivalling one another in depth of blueness and perfect placidity. Antonio—Mrs. Ballantyne's Italian-Maltese Groom of the Chamber, Master of the Privy Purse, and incomparable *chef*—all rolled into one in his brown, lean, lithe, bright-eyed body, has concluded his day's marketing, and is arranging fresh flowers that are too sweet for earth in his mistress' "salon". The task is a congenial one to the color-loving child of the sun. The bombolas, from which depend thick masses of fragile-fronded maiden-hair ferns, hanging in a row in the balcony windows, may be sufficient for cool English eyes, but Tonio loves to group his thick passion-fraught whites and flame-colored reds together in the great sparsely-furnished



salon of this marble palace of which Mrs. Ballantyne is temporarily queen.

It is still early in the day, but Mrs. Ballantyne has retained her English habit of loving fresh air and exercise. She is out already, strolling about the heights above La Valette, and wondering what the day will bring her in the way of diversion. Will it bring Mr. Ballantyne and the *Banshee* back, or will it bring Major Forrester and his tandem ?

While she is thinking these thoughts, and 'Tonio is still grouping his dead whites and burning reds, a visitor is ushered into the salon by Mrs. Ballantyne's new French maid. As Melani neither speaks nor understands English, and Colonel Heathcote's French is so pure that no mere earthly being can understand it, there has been a difficulty at the entrance door. Finally Colonel Heathcote has solved this by pushing past the suave smiling French woman, and gaining the temple of his idol just as 'Tonio is leaving it. The latter, believing the good old Englishman to be the grandfather at least of the idol, plants



him in a draught, offers him fruit and iced water, and leaves him with the smiling assurance that "Madame will come home—" eventually he expresses with a shrug of his narrow high shoulders that covers up his ears for a moment.

For at least twenty minutes Colonel Heathcote is alone in this outer-temple of his divinity, free to look into the books she is reading, to touch the embroidery she has been handling, ( he is rather disgusted to see the initials H. F. on a cigarette case which comes under his observation as he is rooting over the pretty litter on a little table which stands by Laura's pet chair,) and smell the flowers whose odors her delicate little nose will presently inhale.

As he is availing himself of this freedom, he hears a swinging light step, the sound of which is abhorrent to him, approaching the salon from an ante-room, and without due consideration the Colonel slips inside a *portiere* and up a flight of marble steps that will land him ( he believes ) in a room from which he can walk on to a balcony, from thence descend into a garden, and so



make his exit without colliding with his *bete noire*, Major Forrester.

In his haste Colonel Heathcote forgets his hat and stick. Both are strikingly *en evidence* when presently Major Forrester swings into the room, Rush at his heels and the pleasant anticipation of finding Laura here expectant of him in his heart.

“ Out, by Jove, is she ! ” he sings out in response to Tonio’s urbane explanation “ I’ll wait for five minutes,” he goes on, where upon ’Tonio gives him a stale *Times* an *Illustrated London News*, full of portraits that would almost do to publish as novelties again, they are so old, and a society paper with a pleasant little paragraph in it concerning his own and his ponies, successes at the gymcanas and races.

As he finishes reading this he is attracted by Rush’s manner. The brindled bull-dog, after having sniffed at every corner of the long salon, has planted himself at the foot of the flight of marble steps which lead up to Mrs. Ballantyne’s chamber. The *portiere* has been roughly brushed aside, and Rush and his master have a full view of the



vista of steps. As Major Forrester looks up towards this vista his eyes light upon a well-known hat and stick, and, with a laugh in which there is more fun than malice, he springs up and advances to encourage his already vigilant dog.

The sympathy between this man and his beast is beautiful in its entirety and completeness. At a word and a touch from his master Rush lies down with a pious expression of resolve not to budge from the foot of those stairs till the receipt of further orders, which commands respect. Colonel Heathcote, peeping round a graceful curve of those marble steps, catches sight of this expression on Rush's honest, ugly face, and is so impressed by it that he hastily retreats into the only chamber to which these stairs give access and there bewails his miserable condition.

For a few moments Major Forrester waits and whistles gayly in the salon below. Then with a parting injunction to Rush to stay where he is, and not to move on peril of a whacking from a certain courbash of which he already wots, the Beau Sabreur



goes out to pick up his tandem which is waiting, and, if possible, to intercept Mrs. Ballantyne and take her for a drive.

Virtue is rewarded. At her very gates he meets the lady of whom he is in search. The idea of a tandem drive pleases her, and she has no one else near whose pleasure need be consulted.

“Take me to Sleema,” she says, “I want to see the little church there. And after that—oh! drive me where you like. Tom is coming home to-night, I think, but he won’t mind my being out if I am enjoying myself. I did ask Colonel Heathcote to look in this morning, but you say you’ve been in? Did you see him?”

With touching gravity and emphasis Major Forrester assures Mrs. Ballantyne that in all the wild marble waste of her airy salon he has not seen Colonel Heathcote.

“Poor old thing! He hasn’t come yet, so I needn’t wait for him; Harry, what dear ponies these are! I shall enjoy being driven behind them by you intensely.”

She steps swiftly into the dogcart as she speaks, and the tandem skims off, curiously.



regarded by Colonel Heathcote from the vantage ground of that chamber at the top of the flight of marble steps into which he has so unwittingly penetrated.

The poor old Colonel is not here of his own free will any longer. Twice he has essayed the downward passage of those steps, and twice the aspect of Major Forrester's four-footed representative has repelled him. The air is sultry. The Japanese mat at the foot of the stairs conduces to slumber in its white springiness; but Rush, scorning the idea of slumber when he has been told off to watch, sits in a wide-awake attitude upon it with his under-jaw well pointed towards the flight of stairs. His soft, snaky, black-velvet eyes are half closed, but all his dear doggie intelligence is awake, and will remain so until his master relieves him.

For a while Colonel Heathcote, though he regrets the foolish impulse which brought him there, does not find the situation unbearable. His conscience is clear! He is in "my lady's chamber" most innocently. Not for the world (for he is a gentleman)



would he penetrate into one of its sweet mysteries. Her toilet table is covered with Venetian glass and every variety of cosmetic that a blooming blonde can require, but he looks into none of them. Indeed he scarcely moves a step from the top of that flight of stairs down which he is most honorably desirous to descend before anyone becomes aware of his compromising position.

“ Why didn’t the fellow take his brute of a dog with him ? ” he asks himself over and over again, and not even echo answers him. One hour passes and then driven to desperation he takes his courage in both hands, and descends a few steps in a fearless and unconcerned manner that does not even deceive himself.

Far less does it deceive Rush. Rising slowly and stiffly that admirably vigilant dog puts himself into a rigid position, and lifts his sagacious countenance frankly up for Colonel Heathcote’s free inspection. The sight from the point of view of a bull-dog lover and connoisseur is an interesting and pleasing one. The white teeth in the signi-



ficantly protruded, remarkably firm under-jaw are distinctly visible, so is the ominous flash of steel in each expressive eye. Colonel Heathcote is neither a dog lover nor a connoisseur in that noble animal. Rush's personal appearance is intensely interesting at this moment, but it is not by any means "pleasing" to him.

"Still," he argues, "the dog must know me well, he'll certainly let me pass," so he jauntily descends a few steps further, when his progress is rudely arrested by an aggressive movement of Rush, for which he is not prepared. With an agile bound that is startling in a dog of his bulk, Rush hurls himself half-way up the stairs, uttering a growl that speaks volumes of hydrophobic terrors to Colonel Heathcote. As the latter incontinently retreats into his harbor of refuge and bangs the door behind him, Rush recovers his normal affability, and trots down wagging his tail and contorting his body with delight after the manner of a fat eel.

Twice or thrice when his head is cautiously protruded an inch or two beyond



the door, does his fainting spirit revive at the possibility of relief. 'Tonio makes little missions for himself into the salon with more flowers, with baskets of fruit, with visitors' cards. But Rush takes no notice of 'Tonio, and to Colonel Heathcote's disgust makes no attempt to get out of the room, though 'Tonio leaves the salon door open.

It is getting late. The burning heat of the day is over, and gay Malta is beginning to go out for its drives and rides. "Where on earth can that woman have been all day?" he asks of space angrily. He calls her "that woman" now in his rage and bewilderment, though Mrs. Ballantyne has certainly had nothing to do with his current difficulty. He remembers, too, that he has guests at Mess this night, important service guests, the General in Command of the troops bound for India, and the Admiral, and other personages. He remembers the days of his youth, and his unspotted private character, and he nearly weeps as he reflects that it is now well within the bounds of possibility that he may fall a



victim to rabies brought on by the uncalled for enmity of a worse than “mad”—a thoroughly “bad” dog. Faultless as he is, too, in this particular instance, what capital will be made by his enemies—and even so good a man as Colonel Heathcote has enemies!—of the dubious situation in which he will come to his untimely end. Why was he weak enough ever to go out without his revolver in this accursed island! If only he had it now, Major Forrester’s infernal pet should soon meet with its just deserts.

By-and-by, after several more ineffectual sorties upon the stairs and repulses from Rush, about half an hour before that mess-dinner at which, alas! he will not preside to-night, Colonel Heathcote hears a slight commotion below that betokens the arrival of someone. In another instant he hears Mr. Ballantyne’s hearty voice enquiring of ’Tonio where his mistress is. ’Tonio’s explanation is too low-toned to reach Colonel Heathcote’s ears, but he strains these latter intently to catch the next words Mr. Ballantyne utters—which are:



“ Whose dog is that ? ”

“ It is the Major’s.”

“ Oh! Forrester’s to be sure,” Mr. Ballantyne says aloud to himself. Then he asks of ’Tonio: “ What the devil the dog does there without his master ? ”

’Tonio has but one explanation to offer—a shrug of the shoulders, and this is an explanation that naturally irritates an Englishman.

“ Turn the brute out,” Mr. Ballantyne orders, and ’Tonio—who is something of a fatalist—advances to do his master’s behest. As he does so, Rush rises and advances just one little step, with a sad, set purpose in his eyes and growl that causes ’Tonio to bound backwards with electric velocity.

“ Why, the brute is guarding the stairs,” Mr. Ballantyne shouts angrily. “ Who’s up in that room? Go and see.”

It is all very well to tell ’Tonio to “go and see,” but Rush is a Cerberus on whom the most succulent of sops would be wasted. It is in vain that Mr. Ballantyne and ’Tonio offer him choice viands. He looks with



loving eyes askance at the bones, but he will not move an inch to take them.

This pretty play goes on for a period that seems interminable to the agonized man in the room above. He has let the golden moment of easy explanation pass—the moment of Mr. Ballantyne's arrival, and now he would almost as soon face Rush as face the husband of the lady on whom he has come to call in all old-gentlemanly innocence, and who will probably never forgive him for having blundered so miserably.

His guests are arriving about this time, and that fiend Forrester will be having it all his own way at the table, telling stories to his (Colonel Heathcote's) discredit, and "gassing" about himself and his ponies in a way that makes Colonel Heathcote's few spare locks curl with righteous wrath, as he reflects that in all these stories the most obnoxious element is truth!

Meantime Mr. Ballantyne makes 'Tonio's life a burden to him. The unfortunate Maltese is driven at the point of the moral sword into Rush's very jaws several times;



and, though Rush magnanimously refrains from biting a person whom he feels has nothing whatever to do with the case, still he frightens 'Tonio terribly. The dog-fiend will not permit anyone to pass up or down those stairs, and, as Mr. Ballantyne has a certain conviction that there is "someone" in that room above the situation is no more agreeable for him than it is for 'Tonio or Colonel Heathcote.

Only Rush is happy in the proud consciousness that he is doing his duty doughtily. His animus deepens against Colonel Heathcote with every passing minute, for he feels that Colonel Heathcote is the unworthy cause of his (Rush's) prolonged watch, and of his enforced disregard of the tempting odoriferous bones which are offered him at brief intervals in an ingratiating manner, alternately by Mr. Ballantyne and Tonio. His body grows more rigid, his eyes more snaky, and his under-jaw more pronounced as his hunger increases, and when Colonel Heathcote snatches a hasty glance at his enemy, in the forlorn hope that that enemy is tired out and has departed, he



the Colonel is considerably annoyed to find that Rush has ensconced himself in a niche midway up the stairs, out of reach of a revolver which is held in the hand of an irascible gentleman who is half hidden by the *portiere*, and whom Colonel Heathcote rightly surmises to be Mr. Ballantyne.

“If I could only get Ballantyne to listen calmly while I explained the whole miserably absurd circumstances, it would be all right in a minute,” the harassed gentleman thinks. But, unfortunately, he does not see his way to getting Mr. Ballantyne to lend him his (Mr. Ballantyne’s) ear. Accordingly the explanation which would free him from suspicion and reproach is not given. Rush and Mr. Ballantyne, though opposed to one another on some points, are at one in this determination, that the person in the upper chamber, whoever it may be, shall not escape undetected. ’Tonio keeps out of the salon as much as possible, but he is occasionally ordered in by his irate master and commanded to “turn that brute of a dog out.” ’Tonio receives these commands with a saint-like smile that promises obedience. But



somehow the promise is not kept, and Rush is still ready for a tid-bit from the Colonel's plump person when Mrs. Ballantyne comes **home.**



## CHAPTER IX.

## MRS. BALLANTYNE IS PROPHETIC.

LAURA has had a delightful day. Its pleasing influences are upon her visibly, as she glides into the room and gives her husband a glad greeting.

“I’m so glad you and the *Banshee* are back,” she commences. “I want to get up a water-picnic to-morrow, and you’ll help me to do it beautifully. I’ve been out driving tandem with Major Forrester nearly all day and I have enjoyed—why, Tom! What’s the matter?”

“Been out with Major Forrester all day!” he says, greatly relieved, but infinitely more puzzled than before, “then what’s the meaning of that?” he points to Rush who has come to see how things are going on, and who is now standing with his hind legs on the bottom stair, wagging his tail effu-



sively, "and who is in durance vile in your bedroom?"

Laura is unfeignedly perplexed.

"It must be 'Tonio or Melani, poor things! and that wretch of a dog won't let them come down. Really, Major Forrester shouldn't have left his dog—"

"Major Forrester did perfectly right to leave his dog in charge if he suspected anything," Mr. Ballantyne says, "'Tonio and Melani are as much in the dark as we are. It must be one of those confounded natives who has heard something about your diamonds and pearls. I'll have the door broken open and let the dog in."

Mr. Ballantyne thunders out the announcement of this intention in tones that penetrate even into Colonel Heathcote's fastness. There is nothing further to be gained by modest reticence the latter feels. The mess-dinner must be in full swing by this time. His guests and brother officers must be giving him up altogether, speculating probably, as to whether he has been knifed after the playful habit of the aggrieved native, or has fallen into the heinous social sin of



having forgotten the invitations he has given. Weak and weary from having passed through a very fiery furnace of physical fear and mental mortification, he opens the door an inch or two and calls out as clearly as he can :—

“Ballantyne, my dear fellow ! do come up and let me explain matters, I assure you—”

But before he can give the assurance Rush has hurled himself at the door against which he now stands growling hideously.

“It’s Colonel Heathcote,” Laura says aghast. “What can have taken him there ? Poor old man ! Do get him down, Tom.”

But this is more easily said than done. Tom is quite as willing to release and get rid of his old friend as Laura is, but Rush is not in sympathy with them.

“The brute of a dog likes you, why don’t you call him off ?” Mr. Ballantyne asks, not unreasonably, of his wife, and forthwith Laura seeks to justify her claim to Rush’s regard.

Every appetizing biscuit and bone that can be offered to a dog, every endearing



epithet that feminine eloquence, informed by affection, can lavish upon a canine friend, are offered and lavished by Laura to Rush. But Rush is above bribery and corruption. He smiles at Mrs. Ballantyne, and wags his tail at her until she tries to pull him from his post. Then he gives a long, low, rumbling growl that makes Laura precipitately quit her hold of his collar, and leave Colonel Heathcote to his fate.

“We had better send for Forrester,” Mr. Ballantyne says at last. So they send for him, but the answer comes back that “Major Forrester is dining at Mess, and cannot leave his guests.” There is a rider to this message to the effect that they can “turn Rush out when they like *as he* is sure to find his way back to quarters.”

Later on, when the Mess dinner is pleasantly over, Major Forrester makes his way to the Palazzo in which his friends the Ballantynes are residing, and there greatly to his surprise (of course) he finds his Colonel—whose “absence has been much regretted at Mess,” he carelessly observes—in durance vile. Rush is a lamb



in an instant, and when Colonel Heathcote looking rather decrepid after his long incarceration and fast, comes down into the salon that inscrutable dog gambols round his (Colonel Heathcote's) legs in a way that justifies Major Forrester's reply to all complaints :

“ Why on earth didn't you come down? He only wanted to play with you. Rush is awfully fond of a game, aren't you, old man ? ”

“ Does the brute generally snarl when he wants to play ? ” Colonel Heathcote asks testily. He sees that the Ballantynes are laughing at him, and now that it is too late, he knows that he would rather have incurred Mr. Ballantyne's wrath than be the object of their commiseration, so he inquires testily,

“ Does the brute generally snarl when he wants to play? It's all very well to pass the matter off lightly, but the affair might have had a very serious termination. If your beastly dog had bitten me ever so slightly— ”

“ He'd have chawed you up, he wouldn't



have been satisfied with a slight bite if he'd 'gone for you' at all," Major Forrester cuts in with a refreshingly keen appreciation of the humor of the situation.

Then he pulls himself together, for Laura looks annoyed, and adds—

"It was rather hard on the Colonel to be 'booted' up into an asylum he didn't want to seek, by Rush, while we were having that jolly drive wasn't it, Mrs. Ballantyne? The General's in a devil of a rage at your not turning up after inviting him," he adds kindly, "and by the way there's a rumor of disaffection amongst the young troops in dock."

Colonel Heathcote sends the General and the young troops in dock, to that bourn from which no one returneth, and after a strained leave-taking with his unwitting host, he, the unwelcome guest, departs, leaving Major Forrester in possession of the position.

For some time after this little episode Major Forrester finds himself more in social request than ever, for the story is a good one and loses nothing in the telling.



Rush, too is much courted and admired, to his own perplexed surprise; for he is unconscious of having done anything deserving of greater honor than has hitherto been heaped on him. But that this popularity is dearly purchased those who read as they run prognosticate, when they see the expression of Colonel Heathcote's face whenever he is playfully rallied on the subject of having been surrounded and besieged by Rush.

About this time there is a considerable decrease in the kindly affection with which Colonel Heathcote has hitherto regarded Mrs. Ballantyne. The diminution of his regard may be traced to two causes. One is that he has a vivid remembrance of the smile she flashed across to Major Forrester when the latter relieved Rush's guard, and freed Colonel Heathcote. The other is the profound appreciation Mrs. Linley develops for and manifests towards him.

There is balm in Gilead still for him when a sensible, straightforward woman, with "no nonsense about her," prefers his society to that of the man about whom



nearly every woman in Malta is making a fool of herself. But though there is balm in this condition of things, it is not of sufficient quality to heal his wounds. It is very well to be permitted to escort Mrs. Linley to all the public festivals and amusements, and to promenade the "streets of stairs" with her when she is on shopping bent. But he is still conscious of a smarting sensation when he hears that while he has been thus engaged, Mrs. Ballantyne has been riding or driving with Major Forrester, in blissful disregard of his (Colonel Heathcote's) prolonged abstension from that palazzo in which he on one occasion made himself so very much at home.

There are drawbacks also to the bliss of escorting Mrs. Linley when she is on shopping bent. She is a good woman and an excellent mother, and she never makes inroads upon her liege lord's purse if she can help it. In fact she is a crown of glory to her husband, for she makes a better appearance on their rather straitened means than does any other service woman of whom



they wot. She has no false pride about her, and so, when she pathetically laments her inability to give her darling Amy or her precious Bell some article of necessity or luxury for which their respective young souls pine, she is not above allowing Colonel Heathcote to come to her aid with his well-filled purse and generous impulses.

The Linleys' name is legion, but if all the daughters live to be a hundred they will be able to envelope themselves all the time in Maltese lace, so cleverly and remuneratively does mamma pour balm into Colonel Heathcote's gaping wounds. He is highly privileged, he feels, when Mrs. Linley tells him that "*nothing* would induce her to allow Major Forrester to either ride or drive with her." As she has never so much as ascended into a saddle in her life, and looks upon an arrangement in harness of one horse in front of another as an invention of the evil one, there is perhaps less lofty morality and self-denial in this renunciation—or refusal rather—of the Beau Sabreur's society than may appear at first sight.



“I’d give you a penny for your thoughts, only they’re always about Belle and Beauty when you’re driving them,” Mrs. Ballantyne says abruptly one day as they are spinning along behind the pony tandem, and silence has obtained for at least ten minutes.

“Give me the penny, and my thoughts shall be at your disposal. They were not with the ponies.”

“Do you like anything on earth as well as you do those ponies, Harry?”

“Yes—one thing very much better.”

“I ought not to ask you what that one thing is,” she says very softly, and he replies with what strikes her as brutal veracity:

“There’s no reason why you shouldn’t—I was thinking of Miss Lisle.”

“Miss Lisle is rather a good-looking girl, isn’t she?”

“Rather!”

He says this one word in a heartfelt way that makes Mrs. Ballantyne wish she had avoided the topic.

“What were you thinking about her?”



“ I was wishing she could be here to-morrow to see Beau in the hurdle-race.”

“ Why don't you say what you mean? I'll say it for you. You wish she could be here to-morrow to see you ride Beau, and for you to see her! Am I not right?”

“ About right!” he says smiling tenderly at the recollection of Nell's last lingering, loving look at him.

“ Is Miss Lisle destined for some Norfolk Squire of high degree and doomed to live a bucolic life?”

“ Not that I'm aware of.”

“ Then why didn't you bring her out with you as you wish for her so much.”

“ I thought of doing it, but hadn't time.”

“ You speak very confidently, are you sure she would have come?”

“ That's exactly what I hadn't time to find out,” he says, bending down his head towards her in order to make himself heard.

“ In the old days you never needed time when you desired to find out anything of that sort. Age has tamed you a little, I'm afraid, Harry. Take my advice, don't hesitate any longer! If you want Miss Lisle,



ask for her at once. Why should you wait? She's well dowered, I suppose?"

"Indeed I don't know whether she has a penny or not."

"Then you're very silly not to find out before you commit yourself irrevocably. If she hasn't a penny you have so few that you're bound to renounce her. Probably she's always beautifully dressed now, and well mounted; no one appreciates beautiful dresses and good horses more than you do. Unfortunately, Mrs. Harry Forrester, unless she brings the wherewithal with her, will have to indulge in last year's fashions, and go without her hundred guinea hunter."

"If I had *her* I shouldn't care whether she was dressed in the fashion of the year One or not, and I'd go without the ponies to give her a hunter."

"No, you wouldn't," his friend laughs. "You would always be intending to do it, and winning her gratitude by offering to do it. But—she would persuade you to accept the sacrifice of her pleasure at her hands, and you'd be touched by Love's offering and—accept it."



## CHAPTER X.

## THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

It is a day full of great excitement, a day full of burning events. In addition to the races there is to be a tandem show and among those entered is Major Forrester's.

His ponies are in splendid condition, full of beans and pluck, but he is a little "below the mark" he feels, as he struggles with the earliest symptoms of that depressing malaria known as "Malta fever." Nevertheless, when the saddling bell rings, he throws off a light overcoat and stands revealed in his own racing colors.

He is, as usual, with Mrs. Ballantyne, but his attention is wandering from her, a good deal to her chagrin. Presently, as he leaves three of her remarks unanswered, she asks :

"What is it, Harry? Are you ill, or only ill-humored?"



“Both.”

“Then why ride? I thought you meant to put a light-weight on Beau to-day.

“If I had he’d have been handicapped heavily. Macpherson has entered that cob of his, and thrown everything out of gear.”

Macpherson is a naval man, madly desirous of gaining the reputation of being a horsey one. He rides pluckily, ungracefully and unskilfully, but his cob has speed and strength sufficient to make it a formidable rival to “Beau.” The two men have a slight acquaintance with and an intense dislike to each other. It has happened that they have been pitted against one another at various boat-races, rifle and cricket matches and athletic sports in different quarters of the globe, and now that they have collided on the Malta race-course the dislike intensifies itself.

“I wish you weren’t going to ride yourself; please don’t,” Mrs. Ballantyne pleads prophetically, but her pleading is of no avail to-day. Major Forrester goes off without answering her appeal, and presently, rather to her dismay, she sees him at the starting



point next to his *bete noire*—Lieutenant Macpherson.

“If the other four ponies had been between them it would have been more satisfactory,” she says, pointing out the two men to her husband, and his reply after scanning them through the field-glass does not tend to reassure her:

“Forrester looks black and red with rage already. What’s the mischief? Do you know?”

“He doesn’t like his neighbor—”

“And apparently Macpherson is saying something that annoys our friend,” Mr. Ballantyne says laughingly. But Laura’s sympathetic soul foretells breakers ahead.

The flag is dropped, and the six ponies are off, Beau carrying his master as if he were a feather instead of the fourteen stone he is. The gallant little gray steals away from the others—from all but the brilliant bay cob who is his most dangerous rival, and who keeps neck and neck, stride by stride with Major Forrester’s favorite. There are only a few moments now between them and victory and—the “Beau,” who has been



lying off a few lengths behind the cob, making a final effort, comes with a rush—The “Beau wins” is shouted from hundreds of tongues as Major Forrester lifts the gray barb past—

No! not *past* the winning-post! At the very moment, as it seems, of victory the rider of the bay cob, finding he cannot win in any other way, suddenly pulls his horse so as to cross the “Beau” and then by preventing his passing, just succeeds in getting first past the post.

Again the spirit of prophecy descends from Mrs. Ballantyne as she witnesses this episode.

“There will be murder, Tom. Go and get him, bring him here, don’t let him have a quarrel with that man,” she urges vehemently.

“I should be delighted to obey your behest, my dear, but I might as well try to stop a mountain torrent as endeavor to check any little ebullition of wrath on the part of Major Forrester at the present moment.

Voices raised in assertion, in denial, in



accusation, in defence, in fury, fall upon their ears. There is a difference of opinion not only between Major Forrester and Mr. Macpherson, but between the many who have plunged on Beau, and the judges who have declared the bay cob to be the winner. Some few boldly affirm that the bad riding which cut the gray barb out of it was no mere accident. Others hesitate to say this, but declare that "the thing has an ugly look." Major Forrester makes no bones about it at all. He feels very strongly, and he speaks as he feels.

As soon as he has unsaddled he walks up to Mr. Macpherson, who has not received a single congratulation on his victory, and hurls a goodly portion of pungent idiomatic English at the victor's head. The gist of these remarks is to the effect that Mr. Macpherson has ridden foul with an ungentlemanly purpose and the accusation is made for all men to hear, in Major Forrester's most resonant tones.

It is in vain that Macpherson indignantly repudiates the accusation, in vain that he entreats his infuriated rival "to hear rea-



son.” With the fever burning in his veins, with his whole soul in arms against each and every one who opposes his views and seeks to get him to moderate his statements, the *Beau Sabreur* lashes himself into fiercer fury with every hot, unguarded word he utters.

That his tandem, driven by himself, takes the first prize presently is no alleviation to his outraged spirit. Before night every one who knows the two men says that, “It’s a good thing Macpherson sails to-morrow in the trooper,” for Forrester has promised a variety of things to Mr. Macpherson in his rage, and he has a way of keeping such promises with a vengeance.

“I would rather Beau had beaten my cob fifty times than that this should have happened,” Macpherson says truthfully enough to some of their mutual friends. “He’s such an impetuous fellow he won’t listen to reason. He’ll fix a quarrel on me for this, and I’m as innocent as you are of having ridden foul.”

The one whom he is specially addressing is Colonel Heathcote, who has smiled at



Beau's defeat, smiled for the first time since the expiration of his term of imprisonment in Mrs. Ballantyne's chamber.

"I wouldn't trouble my head about it if I were you," he says scornfully; "we all know what he is. Directly the credit of that pony of his is touched, his hand is against every man."

"I wish he would hear my explanation, I'm sorry there should be bad blood between us," Macpherson says temperately. But, unfortunately, he does not speak so temperately when he meets the *Beau Sabreur*.

Brooding over the wrong, whether real or imaginary, which has been done to his pony, Major Forrester goes to bed that night with the fever in complete possession of his system. Wild night-marish dreams crowd his brain, and fatigue him more in his slumbers than any amount of wakefulness would do. Over and over again he goes through the race that he had so *nearly* won. Over and over again that fatal lurch from the bay cob drags him to the ground with a force that seems to hurt him, physically unreal as it is. It is almost a relief to him that



he is summoned :—the young troops are in open mutiny in dock, and the Colonel is away on the other side of the Island, where he has been dining with some friends.

It all passes like a dream. He is to the fore at once, as he always has been and always will be at the delicious call of duty and danger. Swinging down upon them, backed up only by a sergeant and a few privates, he has gathered together in his hurried exit from his quarters, the *Beau Sabreur* justifies the appellation which has been bestowed upon him in the eyes of the disaffected youths. The grand manliness of the man asserts itself over insubordination, illness, and everything that is antagonistic to discipline, in fact. The mutineers, who have been slinging shot about freely before his appearance, lay down their arms like lambs, as, in his defiant fearlessness after making several prisoners, places them in a small outhouse leaving one sentry in charge—he draws a line with a bit of chalk and dares them to pass it alone. Practically he quells a mutiny that, if unquelled, would have brought



dire disgrace and disaster to the British flag, for the young troops are on trial, and their sentiments echo in thousands of breasts at home in England. A mutiny among them, successfully carried out, would have been a bitter blow to the Government. A mutiny averted by the force of a single man's power and promptitude should surely count as something in that man's favor if he ever falls upon evil days.

It is perhaps little to his credit that he has done this thing. For to be gallant and reckless, prompt and plucky, is only to be what he cannot help being himself ! Still the law of compensation works, even he allows, when the next day he is called out and publicly thanked by the Admiral and the General for his splendid, soldierly conduct. Beau's discomfiture and defeat is a degree less hideous to him, when he is told that though the matter of the mutiny must be kept dark, and not allowed to reach England, he will be recommended for promotion.

“ Are you glad ? Has Malta begun to pall upon you ? ”



Mrs. Ballantyne is the speaker, and her questions are a reply to a piece of news he has just given her ; namely, that the regiment is ordered back to England, and that they are to be quartered at Plymouth.

“ Are *you* glad ? ” he questions in return.

“ Yes, very,” she says frankly. “ Tom is tired of it, and we are both pining for a country house in one of the western counties. I believe when it doesn’t rain, Devonshire is rather nice, isn’t it ? ”

He assures her that Devonshire on dry days is very nice indeed.

“ Captain Lisle is at Plymouth, isn’t he ? ”

Major Forrester nods an assent.

“ Then probably his sister, the lovely Nell, will be there, sometimes staying with him. I hope you won’t linger long on the brink, but go over like a man and make an end of it. ”

“ You speak in an unknown tongue. ”

“ Do I. You understand the language tolerably well ; however, I’ll translate for your benefit. I meant to say that I hoped you wouldn’t hover as an undeclared lover around Miss Lisle for long. I would rather



see the blue ribbon put round your neck, and watch you go forth, led by her gentle hand an 'engaged' man at once."

"You're very kind."

"I really think I am." Very few women would magnanimously fall into position as number two after having been number one with you for so long a time as I have. There was a time when I should have been angry if you had married. Now I shall only feel sorry."

"Why sorry?"

"Because a man of your type that's married is a man that's marred. You'll have to *alter*, my dear friend, and I shan't like an 'altered' Harry Forrester one bit. You'll have to cultivate the virtues of prudence and caution and self-restraint, and when you have done these things successfully, I shudder to think what you'll be like."

"Don't commence shuddering yet. Miss Lisle may hold your views, and think that to marry me would be to mar me."

"If *I* were situated with regard to you as Miss Lisle is, I probably should hold different views," she says daringly, and he



likes her for that daring, though at the same time, he feels quite sure that even if she were free—now—to-day, he would still prefer Nell.

“There’s one other thing I want to say to you before we part for an indefinite period,” she begins, with more hesitation than she usually displays in her manner of addressing him.

“Say it, queen of my soul,” he says laughingly.

“I won’t even stay to reprove you, that would be mere stupid waste of time. What I have to say is this : don’t cherish the spirit of vendetta against Mr. Macpherson any longer. Let that unlucky incident slip into the limbo of forgotten things !”

“We’re not likely to come across one another again in a hurry. If we do, I promise you I won’t stir up strife.”

“Do more than that,” she says eagerly. “Do, do promise me that you won’t let yourself be annoyed if he chaffs or jeers about it. His wit is rather lumbering. Promise me that even if it comes down with a dull, heavy thud upon you, that you



*will* be discreet and keep your temper. I should be so sorry to hear that you had got into a row with that man, for so many other people would be glad."

"I won't give you any cause for sorrow," he says; and he means what he says at the moment.

They are standing on the deck of the *Hibernia*—where, together with a large party, they have been lunching—when this conversation takes place, and now they are joined by others, and the talk which has had a touch of sentiment in it, alters its tone, becomes general, and turns upon swimming. Some one who is absent is quoted as having on one occasion swum from the ship "midway" to "Pembroke Camp," an exploit of which both the someone and his friends have ever since been not unreasonably proud. Hearing this bygone feat discussed now, Major Forrester is seized with a sudden desire to excel it and to swim the *whole* distance, over four miles.

Heavy bets are made at once on and against him, Mrs. Ballantyne being one



of his "backers," of course. As she rings out her prophetic opinion that "he'll do whatever he attempts," he takes them by surprise by springing overboard and swimming off, without having gone through the ceremony of denuding himself of anything more than coat and waistcoat. The boats are lowered and speedily filled with eager groups who are more interested in the event as it may determine their own losses or gains, than in the strong swimmer. They follow him all the way for three hours, when he justifies his backers by reaching his goal, which is more than four miles from the ship which has been his starting-point.

"Leander is nothing to you," Laura says approvingly as he comes up dripping to be congratulated. "He did it for love," while you—"

"Have done it for *lucre*," he interrupts laughingly. "By the way, they didn't mention the name of the fellow they make such a fuss about for swimming half the distance."

"I heard just now it was Macpherson,



you can surely forgive and forget about 'Beau' now you have scored in a way that puts his dubious triumph over you in the race completely in the shade."

Major Forrester's eyes deepen and dance with delight.

"If I had known it was Macpherson's record that I was trying to beat, I would have done double the distance," he says, with the easy air which his friends call confidence, and his enemies "swagger." "But don't you delude yourself with the idea that I've washed out the recollection of the shady trick he played me, in the course of the swim. I'd forgive the fellow even now if he had the pluck to come forward like a man and say that in the excitement of the moment he pulled across Beau, and that Beau in all fairness was the winner. But he won't do that, and until he does I shall say what I think of him to his face, whenever I meet him, and behind his back whenever he is spoken about."

"I hope with all my heart you'll never meet him face to face again," Laura says fervently; "if you do, his Scotch caution



will preserve him from indiscretion ; but there will be a row, and you'll be the sufferer, and be made to appear the sinner. You are always made to appear the sinner, you know ! It's the way the world has of dealing with you."

"Perhaps it's because I don't pose as a saint."

"Perhaps it is, and perhaps you're not much worse than those who do so pose. Still it is pathetic that you are more blamed for the things you haven't done than for the things you have."

"While you're philosophizing, Major Forrester is standing in his wet clothes, my dear," Mr. Ballantyne puts in. "If any one observes this incident you will be pronounced indiscreet, and he an idiot."

"I wouldn't dispute the latter part of the sentence, but I'd go for any one who gave utterance to the former," says the *Beau Sabreur* ; and for one evil moment Laura lets herself long for something to occur which may make him proclaim himself her champion openly. As she suppresses all expression of this feeling, however, Major Forres-



ter has the sensation of one who has offered to tilt at windmills, and he allows himself to reflect that the cool way in which Mrs. Ballantyne absorbs devotion like a sponge is not nearly so gratifying as the open manner in which Nell Lisle shows she is proud of it.



## CHAPTER XI.

## DISMISSED THE SERVICE.

A LATE Autumn day, heavy mists hanging over the whole neighborhood, and a dispiriting, drizzling rain descending with dreary pertinacity, and permeating into every nook and corner of the Three Towns. The contrast between those blue waters of the Mediterranean, and blue skies of the South which he had lately left and this leaden-skied, muddy-streeted Plymouth, strikes dismally into Major Forrester's soul, as, with Rush on the seat beside him, he drives up George Street on his way to that "country beyond" which he hopes may be a trifle less revolting than the town in this weather.

It is market-day, and the streets are rather crowded. According to the pleasing habit of the place, the pedestrians desert



the pavements and drift despondently into the streets, and the drivers of nearly every class of vehicle persistently take the wrong side of the road. If Major Forrester's guardian angel is on the alert, he (the angel) must have an anxious time of it just now, for the *Beau Sabreur* gives Bell and Beauty their heads, and they go with a rush that makes the majority of the saunterers in George Street stand clear.

He pulls up at a tobacconist's to get a cigar, and Rush sits for an ill-fated five minutes in charge. True, the tiger has hold of the leader's head, but Rush is the responsible person, as he sits on the box seat, glowering at all the passers-by.

Unhappily ! ill-fatedly ! one of the passers-by happens to be Mr. Macpherson, who recognizes Major Forrester's bull-dog and tandem keenly.

"There's a lot of gas in that turn-out," Macpherson says jeeringly to a friend who is with him, and who unwittingly adds fuel to the fire of Mr. Macpherson's smouldering ill-feeling by saying :

"They're very good-looking ponies, the



best steppers I've ever seen in my life. Their hind action is simply splendid."

"I've got my eyes on a cob for a wheeler who'll take the shine out of Master Forrester's team—"

"Can you drive tandem?—never knew it," the friend puts in unwarily.

"I should rather think I can," Macpherson replies insufferably. As he speaks he holds his stick up in a semi-friendly, semi-menacing way towards Rush, who perceives the menace, but is blind to the friendliness. In a moment that loyal guardian of his absent master's property is quivering alert, stiffening himself, shoving out his under-jaw, slowly rolling his ferocious velvet eyes in the direction of Mr. Macpherson's person, and growling ominously.

"Come along! don't irritate the dog," his friend says. But Macpherson is in an exasperating mood. Something,—who can tell what?—has gone wrong with him this afternoon. He is on shore for the first time for several weeks, and the shore has got into his usually clear head. Raising his voice for the benefit of all and sundry



who may be passing, as well as for that of the man who is standing quietly just inside the door, he says as he shâkes his stick again at Rush :—

“Be quiet, you brute, you’re as great a bully as your master.”

The words are hardly out of his mouth, befor Major Forrester is standing in front of him, plunging his hands into his pockets in order to keep them off his foe, saying in tones that are also unsubdued :

“You were saying there was a lot of gas in this turn-out, and that my dog is as great a bully as his master. Did you mean me to hear your remarks? If you did I’ll thrash you.”

“I meant you to hear them,” the other man says, and as he says it he strikes Forrester in the face, regardless of the fact of the latter’s hands being in his pockets—where it is needless to remark they do not remain an instant after that fatal first-blow.

In a moment the two half-maddened men are struggling fiercely together giving blows heavy enough to fell an ox, and using language in their fury that raises the tempera-



ture of the atmosphere around them. When they are separated—and those who essay to do it feel that they are acting suicidally—at last, the whole place rings with the news that two officers have fought like costermongers in the open street, in broad daylight, to the disgrace of their respective uniforms.

Before the sad, dull sun sets this day, Major Forrester is placed under open arrest, and the first tidings Nell Lisle has of him since his return from Malta is that he is to be tried by court-martial “for scandalous conduct and for using language unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.”

It has been in vain that friends of the offender,—for the majority insist upon it that Major Forrester must have been the “offender,” because they say “Macpherson is such a nice, quiet, steady fellow that he couldn’t possibly have been the aggressor,”—it is in vain that the friends of the offender plead that the affair may be hushed up, and kept quiet on account of his brilliant services, and exceptionally splendid service record. Colonel Heath-



cote has too strong a sense of duty and justice to show any mercy to a man who has had the audacity to see and speak about the humorous side of the gallant Colonel's career. The brother officers who like Harry Forrester, and the men who adore him and regard him as "their major *par excellence*" are quickly taught—or at any rate speedily learn—that if they desire to tread the path of peace in the regiment, they had better abstain from showing anything like partizanship for the man who has been the glory of their corps. He has given his enemy the Chief that chance which Captain Lisle foretold so long ago, and the Chief takes it with a vengeance.

It must be granted that Colonel Heathcote is well within his rights. No one—not even an illogical idolater—can deny that Major Forrester has sinned against service rules, which are almost "holy," they are so inflexible and severe. He has sinned egregiously. He has returned a blow, and resented being called a "bully and a braggart," and for "these things he must suffer" in order that discipline may be main-



tained in the service which he has done so much to glorify. It is made manifest to him, even while he is under arrest and before the court-martial, that these sentiments animate the breast, and permeate the minds of the majority. One or two men in the regiment who have hitherto found his quarters their pleasant daily lounge, and his company the best they can desire, find these quarters and this company less attractive now. They do not absolutely "drop him," for there is "a chance" that the sentence of the court-martial may be less severe than is feared or hoped by some of them. Still an uneasy feeling prevails. It is whispered that the charges against him have been framed in such a way that the Court must find him guilty on one count at least, and, if so,—“he'll lose a year's time, probably, poor fellow”—some of the least time-serving among his friends say pityingly.

His enforced seclusion during the two dreary months that follow before his doom is sealed, is punishment enough for the folly of which he has been guilty. To live in uniform, with the knowledge that he



must not take it off when he pleases, to sit within four walls with the knowledge that he cannot go outside them whenever he likes, to know that an orderly is tramping outside his door for the purpose (theoretically) of bayoneting him if he attempts to escape!—surely these things endured for many weary weeks are punishment enough for a man whose name rings through the service as that of a brave soldier, a gallant gentleman, a leader among men! It is not only that he has always done his duty perfectly, daringly, and well; but he has continually gone outside the duty lines and done such things as mark an epoch in the annals of bravery. He has literally held his life as *nothing* in the service of the Queen—as those who were with him at “McNeill’s Zareba” can testify. He turned the tide at Suakim—but that was “then!” This result of a foolish squabble is “now!” So, after the manner of the world, all that is exceptionally glorious in a man’s career is forgotten, all that makes mothers pray that their sons may emulate him is blotted out, and, just for a foolish *fracas*, for his part



in which it was hoped he would have been "reprimanded" only, Major Forrester is "dismissed the service."

Meanwhile Mr. Macpherson has been tried, found guilty of being a sadly ill-used young man in that he, too, has been under arrest for some weeks, and sentenced leniently to lose some trifling seniority. The impartiality of the respective sentences is a crown of glory to the Courts that found them, the Government that endorsed them, and the country that permits them to be carried out. But to Major Forrester they spell *Ruin*.

No one outside the family circle of a man at whom this worst of Fate's thunder-bolts is levelled, can realize the horror and agony of it. To know that just for some idle difference, just for some foolish intemperate word or deed the whole of a previous career, however brilliant and noble, however self-sacrificial and gallant is to be blotted out, is to enter into Hell upon Earth for the man who has erred for a moment, and for those to whom he is dear. That the degradation which is meted out to the punished man is



only his due is assumed at once and for ever by the vast majority who never trouble their heads to inquire into the merits and demerits, the facts and falsities of the case. The man who "gets off" through some flaw in the indictment against him, through the imbecility of those who fail to accuse him with sufficiently damning virulence, or through personal influence with those in power, is applauded for his ultimate escape and his temporary embarrassment. But woe unto him against whom the indictment is officially "flawless," against whom the Act of accusation has been framed with merciless veracity, and who has no personal influence with those in power. For him there is no "benefit of a doubt," no extenuating circumstance, no chance! He is looked upon as the Devil's progeny, and sent to his Father with all speed by those of his fellow-creatures who have the power to do it.



## CHAPTER XII.

“GENTLY SCAN YOUR BROTHER MAN.”

“As I always said, give him rope enough and he was bound to hang himself, sooner or later.”

The speaker is Colonel Heathcote. The scene is Mrs. Ballantyne's drawing-room, in the pretty house she has rented for six months in one of Plymouth's prettiest suburbs. The time is eight P. M. on the evening of the day on which Colonel Heathcote has had to perform what he terms “the painful duty” of promulgating the sentence of the court-martial on Major Forrester.

“I always said give him rope enough and he was sure to hang himself, sooner or later,” Colonel Heathcote says authoritatively, as the woman he addresses makes no response to his first remark.

She has been sitting very still for the last ten minutes, her hands covering so



much of her face as their size will allow. This show of interest in and sympathy with Major Forrester is the bitterness of gall to the man who cannot forgive the *Beau Sabreur* his successes in love, in war, in sport,—in everything, in fact, in which Colonel Heathcote would himself like to excel and cannot.

She drops her hands as he repeats his quotation of his own former amiable utterance. There are tears in her eyes, but her tones ring out bravely and untremblingly.

“You make me wish that the rope was round your own neck when you exult over the ruin of such a man as Major Forrester. Surely *now* is not the time to recall and repeat all the ill-natured, vindictive hopes and fears you have been in the habit of expressing about him.”

“If I had not been your father’s friend, and if I had not a very sincere and strong regard for you, Mrs. Ballantyne, I would—”

“Take your leave in a dignified huff, and leave me to my own evil devices ! Is that what you wish me to understand you would do, if it were not for that legendary



friendship for my father which you tell me existed? Ah! no! you will never quarrel with me—while you think other people find me attractive.”

She speaks with such evident truthfulness, with such unfeigned weariness that it is borne in upon him that she means exactly what she says, and that her estimate of the toughness of his devotion to her and its motive-power is a current one.

“As an old friend—you’ll grant me that claim?—as an old friend, one who knows the world and its wicked ways much better than you do, let me advise you, *beg* of you to make no display of partisanship for this man, who is merely reaping what he has sown. The general feeling, I assure you, is that the regiment is well rid of him. After all, he is merely an exceptionally strong fellow, endowed with a ferocious and ungovernable temper and a love of fighting.”

“As the enemies of his country have found on innumerable occasions,” she puts in incisively. Then, in a sadder tone, she asks:

“You don’t mean it, you don’t tell me



*really* that anyone—any *man*—in the regiment is glad of this hideous *finale* ? ”

“ To be candid, I must tell you that the majority are very much resigned to the loss of one whom they cannot regard as an ornament to the regiment.”

“ So soon ! This is the most rapid change of opinion I ever heard of. Rats leave a ‘falling house’ I know, but I’m sorry to learn that there are *men* who emulate rats so successfully.”

“ You are sarcastic and furious— a woman, should never be either, my dear Mrs. Ballantyne. Believe me, I know more about the man’s character than you can possibly do. Men have opportunities of guaging other men that are denied to a woman—”

“ Tell me what are these black spots on his character with which I am unacquainted ? ” she interrupts impatiently. “ You who know so much more about him than I do, you say, tell me. What are the hideous ulcers under the fair surface ? Has he ever done anything treacherous or timid ? Has he ever broken a trust or shown himself a



coward? Has he ever slandered man or woman? Has he been those worst of all things that a man and soldier can be—either a laggard in love or a dastard in war? If he has been one of them, and you prove it to me, I'll give him up—though it will break *my* heart to do so, now when other people will be so ready to forsake the fallen man.”

“I can't say that he has ever been guilty of any of the offences you particularize,—they're not in his line, no one would ever dream of accusing him of them,” Colonel Heathcote hurriedly admits. “Nevertheless” he goes on more deliberately, “he is not the sort of a man I should permit my wife to be intimate with, if I had one ; and I shall strongly advise Ballantyne to take my view of the matter and counsel you (in his case the counsel would be a command!) to drop him !”

“Thank you! Fortunately Mr. Ballantyne is in the habit of judging for himself, and of acting on his own judgment, irrespective of other people's opinion.”

She speaks coolly and suavely, and so



disappoints her old friend, who has a strong desire now to irritate her into saying something intemperate or ridiculous on behalf of Major Forrester. His next words will surely throw her off her balance.

“Have you any idea what he is going to do now? He ought to be looking out for something at once.”

“He was made acquainted with the fact that his whole career was wasted and blighted about three o’clock to-day, I believe. He’s more or less than man if in these few hours he can have given his mind to any scheme for the future.”

“That fellow Lisle joined him directly he came out after the sentence, and invited him down to his brother’s place in Norfolk. An imprudent thing to do, and one that Lisle’s brother won’t thank him for, I should think, especially as he was very fond of the sister, when he dared aspire to her. He’ll hardly dare to do that now, I should say.”

“God bless the Lises!” Laura says with such fervor that again a slight twinge of disappointment oppresses her auditor’s



breast. That there is a touch of sentiment in Mrs. Ballantyne's warm friendship for the *Beau Sabreur* has long been patent to the Colonel. ("Surely now," he thinks, "she'll resent his going to Miss Lisle for solace, rather than coming to her.") Aloud he says:

"I never knew that Captain Lisle and you were allies."

"We are now, if the strong regard we both have for Major Forrester, and the strong desire we both feel that he *may* find solace, the dear ill-used fellow, in anyone so good as Nell Lisle, can make us allies." Then she rises up, crosses to the door of a little inner boudoir, opens it and cries out:

"Nell! come here and tell Colonel Heathcote that Major Forrester has not only dared to aspire to you, but that he has had the audacity to win you. Yes! those days while he was under arrest were very dark ones, but I took care that they should be brightened as much as possible by the society of a girl who is going to make him the best and pluckiest



wife that ever a man has had in the world. I see you're too much surprised, Colonel Heathcote, to offer her your congratulations now, so I'll spare you to go back to him, Nell." And Miss Lisle, who is a little flurried and embarrassed by the consciousness that her fiery and impatient lover is in the adjoining room, and that at any moment he may come in search of her and untowardly confront the man whose tender mercies have been her lover's undoing,—does as she is bid, obediently.

Instantly on this Colonel Heathcote takes his leave—feeling neither a better nor a wiser man for this revelation of herself and her real motives which Mrs. Ballantyne has made. (“I thought her a mere heartless mass of vanity and friskiness, and would have sworn that she would either give him the cold shoulder now he has come to grief, or else elope with him now such a proceeding can no longer injure him in the service. But that Laura Ballantyne should stick to him still, and at the same time resign him to that girl, astounds me !”)



Possibly it astounds others besides Colonel Heathcote, among them Laura herself, who never realized while the sun of success and popularity was shining on him that she would have the stamina to be true in the highest sense of the word both, to him and to herself, should that sun be withdrawn.

So there is balm in Gilead still for the man whom unmerciful disaster follows fast and followed faster at this epoch. Others besides Colonel Heathcote feel that Fortune is not going to give Harry Forrester nothing but kicks when they hear that Miss Lisle intends to link her lot with his, whatever that lot may be. That Mrs. Ballantyne has relinquished flirting with him in order that she may develope into the heartiest partisan that a man can have, is perhaps also a little perplexing to those who have been ready to think evil of her and him too—for so long.

Still though there is some compensation for him in these facts, though Nell's love and Laura's friendship for him are things that pass all understanding in their respective



ways, his state is still a woefully sorrowful one. Cut off from the service he loves as only a man who is every inch a soldier can love it, deprived of the power of going to the front as he has invariably done for twenty-three years whenever he got the remotest chance of doing it, cast out into penury, and practically robbed of the power of getting other employment! What Christian will be found to give him not only advice and censure, but a helping hand at this juncture? Will merciful Majesty bid him take up his sword, re-don Her colors, and wear and bear both in Her service again? Will Justice and Clemency shake hands and reconsider that sentence which is condemning him to moral and social death and destruction, and restore him to that position he is ready to fill so gallantly and honorably? Will the Country let it appear that it is resigned to seeing men who have served it boldly, brilliantly and well, thrust out to consort with Ruin? Will no efforts that must compel recognition be made by those who have the power to get him re-established? These



are the burning questions that he and those to whom he is dear, and to whom his character is an open book, ask themselves feverishly as the long dark days roll by, resolve themselves into months, and still find him and leave him not re-instated yet! "When a star has shone so brightly, can you glory in its fall?" may be pertinently asked of those who can make this star to shine again an' they please.

Of those who have not this God-given power it may be asked that at least they abstain from injuring his cause by uttering defamatory gossip about Major Forrester, which, though it may make a "pretty story" to enliven the deadliness of an "afternoon tea" in Plymouth or its neighborhood, has probably no foundation in fact, but is none the less ruinous for that. To quote some of Burns' verses, addressed "*To the Unco Guid*:"

"Oh ye, who are so guid yoursel,  
Sae pious, and sae holy,  
Ye've nought to do but mark and tell  
Your neighbors' faults and folly."



“ You see *your* state with theirs compared,  
 And shudder at the niffer;  
 But cast a moment's fair regard:  
*What* made the mighty differ?  
 Discount what scant occasion gave  
 That purity you pride in  
 And (what's aft mair than all the lave)  
*Your better art of hiding!*

“ Then gently scan your brother-man,  
 Still gentler sister woman,  
 Tho' we may go a kenning wrang,  
 To step aside is human!  
 One point must still be greatly dark,  
 The moving ‘ why ’ they do it;  
 And just as lamely can ye mark  
 How far perhaps they rue it.”

“ Who made the heart, 'tis *He* alone  
 Decidedly can try us—  
 He knows each chord—its various tone,  
 Each spring—its various bias.  
 Then at the balance let's be mute  
*We* never can adjust it,—  
 What's *done* we partly may compute,  
 But know not what's *resisted*.”

These words plead with an eloquence that I cannot hope to emulate for condonation of the few faults and frank follies of the *Beau Sabreur*.



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